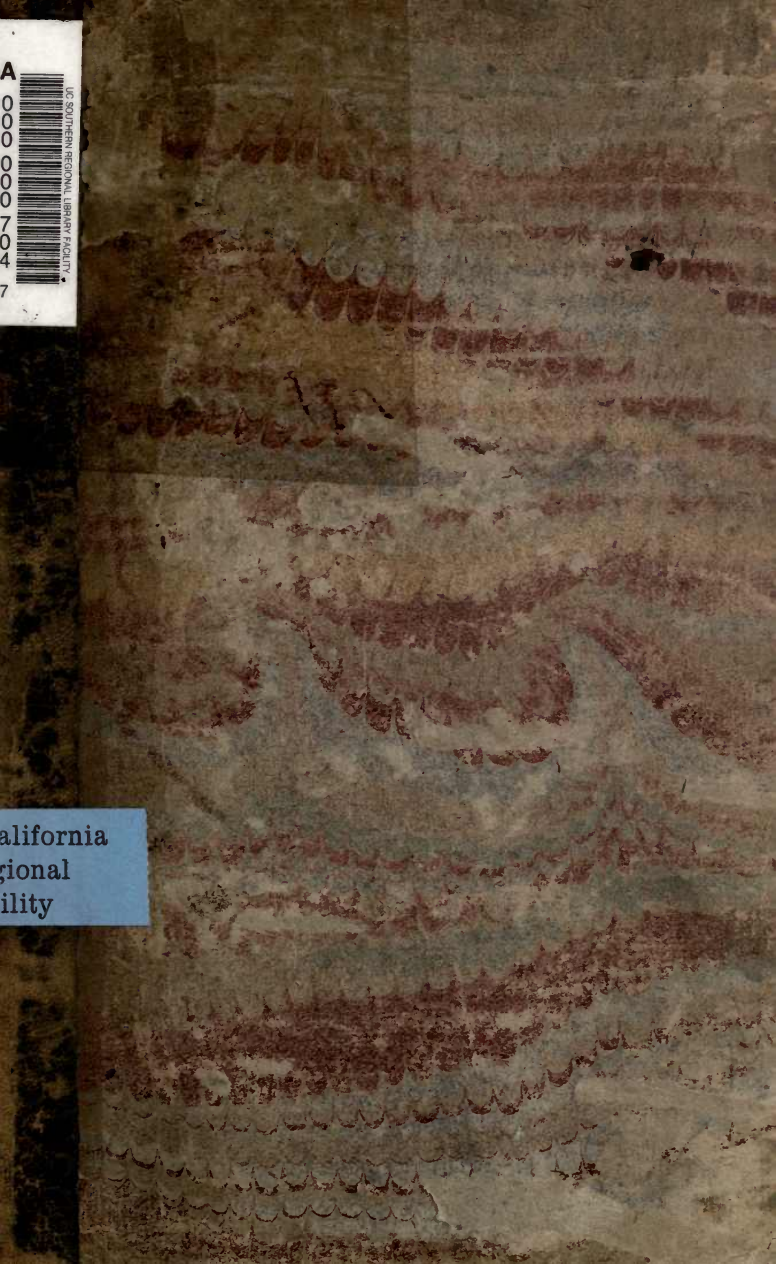

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE

Religious Study

OF

NATURE.

In THREE LETTERS
to a FRIEND.

Ἀρεῖης γαρ ἐλπὶς ὁ ΘΕΟΣ εϛιν, ἐ δειλείας
πρόφασις. Plutar.

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LETTER I.

SIR,

ON receiving yours, I immediately determined to contribute all in my power, towards aſſiſting your moral enquiries, particularly ſo far as they relate to the right manner of being introduced to the religious ſtudy of nature. Much thought has been employed in conſidering how this might be done in a pleaſing and uſeful manner: whether at laſt I have ſucceeded herein, you are to judge for yourſelf; and in reading over theſe letters, let no prejudices in my favour biaſs your judgment. To you I write not in that abbreviated manner I ſhould do to a perſon immerſed in buſineſs and the cares of the world. Epiſtolary *Diſſertations* are ſo often

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found in the ſhade of ſtudious retirement, that they ſtand in need of no apology to an academician. I ſhall not therefore apologize for mine. This firſt letter is a recommendation of the ſtudy of Moral Philoſophy in general, and of the Deity and his providence in particular, which at this time ſo very much engage your attention. Virtue is alſo recommended in it, without which the beauties of moral knowledge cannot be truly admired. But before I proceed farther, let me inform you, that I have taken the liberty to ſubſtitute the name *Mathetes* in the room of your own. No inſinuation that you ſhould become my diſciple is hereby intended. Go on to converſe with truth freely. Follow the voice of wiſdom, and you are the very *Mathetes* I wiſh you to be. Upon the advances already made towards a well-finiſhed education, I ſincerely congratulate you. Diligence and perſeverance in the firſt paths of learning, where the unentertaining rudiments of knowledge come principally under conſideration, are virtues highly commendable. They deſerve well to be rewarded; and, next to the rewards of goodneſs and religion, theirs are the moſt excellent of all others. For our inſtruction and entertainment, are ſtill preſerved

ſerved many fine volumes in the *Greek* and *Roman* Language, ſome of which, in their elegant ſimplicity, are ſurpaſſed only by nature herſelf. The ſiſter arts and ſciences were never found guilty of ingratitude. Thoſe who are faithful in the purſuit of them, and who are led to the purſuit by a native bent of genius, come ere long to the poſſeſſion of their amiable graces. You have in part already enjoyed this pleaſure. And after converſing inſtructively with theſe leſſer ſciences, and obſerving their ſeveral beauties, are you ſtill diſengaged? Are you yet at liberty to ſeek after what is more truly beautiful? Come then and let us walk together in the contemplative admiration of providence. Your former ſtudies will contribute to the more eaſy reception of moral knowledge, than which, of the various ſpecies of knowledge, there is no one more inſtructive, no one to a virtuous mind more pleaſant. And after having affirmed thus much, you will now expect my recommendation of the moral ſcience to begin. Let it be ſo. The undertaking is eaſy; for to ſhew wherein this ſcience conſiſts, is in effect ſhewing its importance. But I would not only have you ſatisfied of its *importance*; the genuineneſs of the criterion by which its

ſupreme worth may be demonſtrated, is indiſputable. It is this:

"KNOWLEDGE is valuable, as it can be "reduced to the practical uſe of life, and de- "ſerves more or leſs regard, in proportion to "its capacity of making us in a greater or "leſs degree happier and better than we "otherwiſe ſhould be." Every ſcience is to be eſtimated by this rule, and hereby we are to judge how far the ſeveral branches of learning deſerve to be purſued. This is the reaſon why I never wiſhed you to become the mere abſtract philoſopher, or a profound adept in the uninſtructive reſearches of a mathematical nature. Some knowledge of the abſtruſe metaphyſic ſcience may prove ſerviceable to you in the inveſtigation of truth; but beware of its deep receſſes, where you may ſoon wander out of your knowledge, and, after much perplexity, return without any kind of advantage. Beware alſo of thoſe other meerly curious ſpeculations juſt now mentioned. They may be amuſing, but that is not ſufficient to apologize for great expence of time about them. They ſhould be either inſtructive to yourſelf, or calculated to diffuſe pleaſure amongſt others: they ought indeed to have ſome friendly reference to the good

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of the Community. So far as the lineal and demonſtrative ſcience aggrandizes our opinion of the divine works, it merits regard: and however we find it employed, if hereby it contributes to the benefit of ſociety, it is without diſpute worthy of encouragement. An attempt to ridicule the pilot's knowledge of the heavenly bodies, by which he is certainly better enabled to direct his voyage, would be itſelf ridiculous: but the mere abſtract philoſopher is to be aſked, what his ſpeculations contribute to the utility of the public and the good of life? Do they concern us? and can we feel their uſeful influence? To bring them into repute with the wiſe, he muſt ſhew how we may become real Gainers by them. Their ſubtlety is no recommendation, if they neither tend to give our minds nor our actions a good biaſs. If they neither add to the utility nor real ornament of life, they cannot deſerve to be eſtimated at any thing conſiderable. *Socrates* is mentioned by *Plato* in his dialogue on philoſophy, as falling one day into converſation with the *Eraſti*, or ſtudious lovers, when they were intenſely engaged in drawing circles to repreſent the inclinations of the heavenly bodies. He had not been long in their company, before one

of

of them ſaid to him, " O *Socrates*, it is beau-
" tiful to philoſophize." The ſage moraliſt, in return, demanded to know his idea of philoſophy, otherwiſe he could not tell whether it was comely or deformed. Do you think, ſaid he, philoſophy is only beautiful? is it not good alſo? It was a favourite maxim with *Socrates*, as you will find in reading over his memoirs by *Xenophon*, that the utility of the diſpoſition in any ſcheme conſtituted its beauty. By this maxim he was drawn off from rightly attending to the internal ſenſe, and thus made his idea of beauty too ſimple and uniform; but when applied to philoſophy, the principle is right, that only is the fair and beautiful which is uſeful and good. To the queſtion, what it was to philoſophize, the young diſputant replied in the words of *Solon*, " to be
" ſeeking after the knowledge of various things
" till life expires." This is the very ſtile of an academician. I ſeem to hear you ſpeak the ſame language, enamoured of the ſhades of contemplative life. This anſwer became one who was in ſincerity a lover of learning, but it was too general. The divine old man could not tell from hence, whether the youth had the courſe of his ſtudies turned the right way. He might, for what he knew, be an undi-

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rected traveller thro' the wide field of ſcience. The youth was therefore farther queſtioned, " What are thoſe things which it becomes a " lover of wiſdom to learn?" This is an important enquiry. Within the province of learning there are low and trivial purſuits; and to fix upon theſe, when there is liberty of chuſing others far more excellent, and genius capable of engaging in them, muſt be extreamly wrong. There is no monopolizing true ſcience, and its happieſt ſcenes are open to all. This is the glorious prerogative of the ſtudious life; and ſince it is ſo, the enquiry, what are thoſe things which it becomes a lover of wiſdom to learn, ought ſtrictly to be attended to. The youths, with whom *Socrates* was engaged in diſcourſe, diſputed not the propriety of his queſtion; but one of them thus replied, " It becomes every lover " of wiſdom to learn thoſe inſtitutions which " are the moſt excellent in themſelves, and " the moſt conſonant to the human mind; " thoſe inſtitutions by which philoſophy will " be moſt truly honoured: adding alſo, that " he would be beſt capable of doing it this " honour who underſtood the various arts and " ſciences, eſpecially thoſe of the higheſt " worth." The youth not foreſeeing the

conſequence which would be drawn from it, was led to confeſs, that the character of the true philoſopher did not take into it a minute diſquiſition of every art. He acknowledged it wrong alſo for one who ſought after reputation in wiſdom, to engage his thoughts ſo entirely on any ſingle branch of knowledge, as to be a ſtranger to the reſt. He thought he ſhould be rather ſtudious to acquire a moderate acquaintance with them all. But then, ſaid *Socrates*, if this be the philoſopher's character, how is it uſeful? ſince there are different perſons who make the diſtinct arts and ſciences the buſineſs of their lives. In caſe of ſickneſs, you would prefer the phyſician's advice to the philoſopher; or if in a ſtorm at ſea, you would commit the veſſel to the pilot rather than to him. Thus he cloſely urged the debate to bring it to the point aimed at, which was to rectify their vague purſuit of wiſdom, and ſhew that only by the aſſiſtance of moral ſtudies they could come to the poſſeſſion of it. Thus you ſee the moral ſcience may be fairly compared with others, and fairly claim the preference, and to hear the voice of one greatly famed for wiſdom, recommending it to young ſtudents, may be ſome ſatisfaction to you. We now ſtand upon the borders of its

its province, let us enter into it, and deſcribe it; this will prove it to be indeed the true ſovereign philoſophy.

THE province allotted to this moral ſcience, " is to enrich the human mind with the no- " bleſt and beſt ſentiments of the Deity, drawn " from a well-grounded belief, that happineſs " is the original tenor of all things thro' the " univerſe; to contemplate whatever is au- " guſt, harmonious, or good, throughout na- " ture and providence, in reference to the ſu- " preme mind, with ſuitable diſpoſitions, " ſuch as admiration, gratitude, reverence and " truſt. Its province is to explain ſeeming " irregularities, particularly the ills of human " life, in a manner conſiſtent with the high- " eſt and beſt opinion of providence; alſo to " moderate our ſeveral appetites and ſenſitive " deſires, according to the right ſubordina- " tion of nature *, is its natural province; " to chaſtiſe the irregular paſſions, to im- " prove the godlike and benevolent ones; " ever regarding the juſt balance of the af- " fections, which conſtitutes the good and

* In the dialogue mentioned above, philoſophy is repreſented by *Socrates* as a diſciplinary art, conſiſting principally in moderating the affections and powers of the ſoul according to the laws of reaſon and virtue.

" virtuous ſtate. Thus its exalted and in-
" tereſting aim is to inſtruct us in the know-
" ledge of God and his perfections; to ag-
" grandize our ſentiments of the univerſe, its
" laws and government; to familiarize to our
" view the principal deſigns of our own be-
" ing; to model our whole conduct in cor-
" reſpondence with theſe, and thus direct us
" to the dignity and true happineſs of moral
" life." This is antient wiſdom; this is the true philoſophy, of which neither *Socrates*, *Timæus Locrus*, nor the eldeſt father of wiſdom in *Greece* was the author; for it has been the voice of God to his intelligent creatures from the beginning. Now, *Mathetes*, look back to the preceding rule, by which knowledge is to be eſtimated, and you cannot help drawing the inference in favour of this moral and divine knowledge. What has been ſaid terminates in theſe two particulars, that no ſcience has a more diſtinct ſphere of purſuit than the moral one; and that the ſubjects about which it is employed, cannot for their uſefulneſs and importance be ſurpaſſed by any. That part of it which relates to Providence, comes within this general recommendation. In the dignity of the ſubject, or in the excellent effects which it produces on the human mind,

mind, it is no way inferior to any branch of moral philoſophy. The ſubject is noble. In reality, it is no leſs than the inveſtigation of the divinity thro' the amazing plan of his operations exhibited to our view. It is a comprehenſive examination of the laws of the univerſe, in order to aſcertain the leading diſpoſition and character of its author. The examination rightly made, proves this ſupreme being to be infinitely good. It teaches us of conſequence to look upon life in a more amiable light than otherwiſe we ſhould do, and to the virtuous imparts at preſent ſome foretaſte of thoſe felicities which are yet to come. The ſubjects before you are then of the beſt kind; and there can therefore be no reaſon for cenſuring yourſelf, nor any reaſon to fear being cenſured by others, for ſitting down to make a deliberate enquiry into them. The undertaking is not only free from cenſure, but the higheſt indication of a judicious mind. It has no alliance with thoſe fruitleſs ſpeculations upon which there is in no ſenſe an intereſt depending; and therefore, whatever ridicule they are expoſed to, who puzzle for years about thoſe things, in which neither they nor the community are concerned, this cannot affect you. " The moral literature is the true

" province of man. It muſt be ſo, ſince his
" beſt nature and higheſt intereſt are univer-
" ſally acknowledged to be moral. And if
" they are moral, this ſtudy alone comes up
" to the true end and dignity of rational life.
" This then is the maſter-ſcience, in compa-
" riſon of which moſt other ſciences are no
" more than the toys of literature: even the
" ſcience of government and laws is derived
" from it, and cannot, according to the order
" of nature, deſerve equal honour." It would be unneceſſary to add any thing more in its recommendation. I ſhall not attempt it. But it is natural to make here this obſerva-tion, How much are you indebted to provi-dence for being invited to frequent the peace-ful ſhades of moral contemplation, where re-ſide the divineſt felicities, from which moſt men, thro' the want of education, are ex-cluded? It is your happineſs to be whiſpered out of the croud by the voice of that celeſtial wiſdom, whoſe inſtructions, if you are de-voted to them, will make you one of the happieſt of men. To walk by the ſide of thoſe pure ſtreams over which ſhe preſides, will give you more pleaſure than I am capable of expreſſing. There a fair delineation of di-vine benevolence riſes to our view, with the

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images of nature and truth in their moſt beautiful attitudes and proportions. There the charms of philoſophical perſuaſion grow powerful; thoſe charms, the auſpicious influence of which ere long, I hope, you will confeſs, and become one of their moſt faithful admirers. How various and elegant, how fair and good do the perſpectives of life and providence appear in this region of moral philoſophy! To *me* they appear in a wonderful manner adorned with the divine benignity and love; and I am not in the leaſt degree ſuſpicious of any ill deſign in nature. But *you*, on the contrary, ſeem fearful, leſt nature ſhould not be animated with a truly benevolent diſpoſition. And I find your timidity is occaſioned by ſome who diſpirit both themſelves and others with their inflexibly ſtern and ill-natured opinion of the providential conduct, by thoſe who call in plagues, tempeſts and wars, introducing public deſolations and private miſeries to witneſs the truth of their doctrine. How ſuch objections to a good adminiſtration are to be anſwered, is what you enquire after; and believe me, the enquiry is important; for what enjoyment can there be in life, if the divine and all-directing power frowns upon it. The attempting to plan out

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an artificial happineſs will be in vain, if life itſelf was originally intended to be miſerable. No wonder then if, ſo much alarmed, you aſk, " Where am I? by what hand brought " hither? and with what view? Teach me " how to think well of providence! teach " me, if poſſible, how to be happy! O " teach me that beſt ſcheme, if ſuch a ſcheme " has any rational foundation! the mention- " ing of which will throw the ſmile of joy " upon my face! that ſcheme which is ap- " proved by reaſon, which inſpires with hope, " and baniſhes fear, ſuſpicion, and doubt- " fulneſs from the virtuous, with all terrify- " ing anxieties and cares about an hereafter. " That ſcheme in which the ſun, the moon, " and attending ſtars ſhine with unclouded " brightneſs, moving regularly and to the " general good, without influencing to ſuper- " ſtition, and in which nature appears ſmil- " ing like a parent in love with her own " offſpring. I ſeek to know that ſcheme in " which her myſterious and leſs open tracts " are freed from the barbariſms of falſe ſci- " ence, and ſhewn to be unhaunted with " demoniſm, that thus I may ſtill have rea- " ſon to believe the ſame wiſe and good ge- " nius preſides as well in theſe receſſes as in

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" the open plain of nature, ſuffer me not to
" wander diſconſolate and in perplexity of
" thought, but inſtruct me in that chearful
" and benign philoſophy, which enables the
" human underſtanding to behold the Deity
" as invariably benevolent amidſt the viciſſi-
" tude of things." As neceſſary to obtain the poſſeſſion of what you ſo earneſtly deſire, I recommend, in the firſt place,

THE cultivation of a virtuous temper, without which the beauties of moral ſcience cannot be truly reliſhed. Permit me to ſay, that much depends upon a right initiation into the ſchool of philoſophy. In this I would not be thought ſuperſtitiouſly exact, or as one punctual to a trifle. Your future progreſs will be unſpeakably facilitated by being introduced the right way, which lies thro' the temple of virtue. To this nothing will contribute more, than an honeſt examination of your own heart; and the wiſe introductory ſoliloquy ſhould be ſomething of this ſort:

" IN order to converſe hereafter with God
" and truth, I am perſuaded it is right firſt
" to converſe with myſelf, and look over my
" own paſſions and opinions. Come then,
" my ſoul, let me aſk thee, are theſe, as
" hitherto, neither irregular nor ill-formed?

" Are not thy opinions, are not thy deſires
" vitiated? Have no ill examples ſullied the
" original complexion of thy nature, and in-
" fuſed pollution into it? Are there no im-
" pure paſſions lodging within this breaſt to
" debaſe my ſentiments of divinity, order,
" and good? Is all right and well within?
" Does no bigotry hang about me? Am I
" not the bondſman of ſome party? Am I
" a free enquirer after truth as it exiſts in God
" and nature? Is my heaven-born ſpirit
" enobled with the chaſteſt aſpirations after
" truth? Is it erect, calm, attentive, and in
" a juſt poſture for divine contemplation? Are
" my rational powers at liberty to enter upon
" the ſacred employment which is now be-
" fore me? And are my paſſions diſengaged
" from leſs worthy objects, waiting to ad-
" mire the beautiful ſtructure of nature, and
" to praiſe the government of the world?"
He who can undergo this home-ſcrutiny, and anſwer for his own freedom, integrity, and good deſign, may enter the region of moral inquiry, and promiſe himſelf the higheſt enjoyment. This ſelf-examination is here introduced upon the ſuppoſition, that free judgment and virtuous diſpoſitions are neceſſary to any one's contemplating, in a divine manner,

beneath

beneath the ſhades conſecrated to philoſophy. The neceſſity of this good moral temper, in order to the right purſuit of moral ſtudies, may not be in this place improperly conſidered.

IT was one of the noble principles of the divine *Plato*, that the ſoul muſt be purged from all baſe and ſordid paſſions, before it can ever be ſaid καθαρως φιλοσοφειν, *purely to philoſophize*. Agreable to this, a juſtly celebrated author *, in his *True Method of attaining to Divine Knowledge*, expreſſes himſelf in theſe words: "Every thing is beſt "known by that which bears a juſt reſem- "blance and analogy to it; and therefore the "Scripture is wont to ſet forth a good life, "as the prolepſis and fundamental principle "of divine ſcience. That the reaſon why, "notwithſtanding all our acute reaſonings and "ſubtile diſputes, truth prevails no more in "the world, is, we often disjoin truth and "true goodneſs, which in themſelves can ne- "ver be diſunited; they both grow from the "ſame root, and live in one another." He aſks, "What are all our moſt ſublime ſpe- "culations of the Deity, which are not im-

* *Smith*'s Select Diſcourſes.

" pregnated with true goodneſs?" And ſays of vice, " It is the deadly night-ſhade which " infuſes its cold poiſon into the underſtand- " ings of men." It muſt be acknowledged, vicious men may have ſtrong reaſoning powers, and in fact we ſee many ſuch excel in arts uninſpired with virtue; but in thoſe ſciences which converſe with chaſte beauty and moral ideas, it is by no means probable they will ever excel. Here they labour under inſuperable difficulties; for it is certain, that by vice the moral diſcernment is extreamly impaired. There is a natural connection between tempers and ſciences; and where the mind has in itſelf this likeneſs and affinity to the ſtudy it purſues, where it is wrought into a natural kind of aſſimilation to it, being properly circumſtanced, it is ſure to excel in its way: but where it is the reverſe, the purſuit will be unſucceſsful; and whatever is done bear the marks of violence upon it. The truth of this general reaſoning is confirmed by obſervation. You will therefore conſider with how much juſtice it may be ſaid, that the human mind, when ſunk down from its true eminence by ſenſual paſſions, cannot be rightly diſpoſed for the ſtudy of a moral adminiſtration. It is hereby alienated from the ſubject; it has no

reſemblance to it in its own complexion, nor any reliſh for its pleaſures. There is a palpable incongruity in ſuppoſing impure natures qualified to arrive at the ſublimity and perfection of this ſacred knowledge, ſince what may be called moral judgment, is requiſite to the attainment of it. Believe me in earneſt, when I affirm, that it is but an inferior part of philoſophy to be on rational evidence convinced of the exiſtence of God and Providence, while theſe truths are maintained only in the way of calm unfeeling ſpeculation; the ſacred *pathos*, with which it influences the raptured ſoul, perfectly ſymphonizing and in ſweet accord with the univerſal ſcheme, is the nobleſt part of it. It does not conſiſt in a train of cool deductions; but walking amidſt the fair ſcenes of wiſdom and benevolence, it gradually warms and enflames, the contemplation ſoon becomes animated with the love of ſupreme order, and is exalted into a divine confidence and affectionate admiration. Thus the higheſt branch of this ſcience conſiſts in ideas of moral dignity, beauteous order, and perfect goodneſs. And therefore every mind which cannot fairly receive theſe ideas, can never attain to the perfection of the true theology. However ſubtile and abſtract its theo-

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rems may be, without theſe ſublime, pathetic, and lovely impreſſions, it is ſtill a ſtranger to the divine and parent wiſdom. God is to be admired in thoſe various forms of harmony and goodneſs which every where ſurround the footſteps of men; and the perception of ſuch excellency and worth does in the nobleſt ſenſe dignify the human ſoul. He who is debaſed by ſordid views, and whoſe taſte for moral delineations is depraved, cannot then be prepared for an induction into the ſtudy of providence. He muſt firſt undergo a virtuous purification, recover the true ſenſibility of good temper, and have worn off every ſtain of the malevolent paſſions. Before his induction, the benumming and ill-looked perverſions of vice are to be removed. The reaſonableneſs of all this muſt be very evident to you; for how can that which is inwardly ugly and diſtorted juſtly contemplate what is moſt amiable and harmonious. How can that which is dark and ſenſual behold the intellectual ſource of light and virtue? Or how rightly meditate the origin of good, when it is averſe to thoſe godlike pleaſures which await the practice of goodneſs in the preſent life. There is an evident impropriety in imagining any perſon ſo much degenerated from his original likeneſs

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to the Deity, ever to excel in the divine literature. While remaining in ſuch a ſtate, he cannot be ſincerely charmed with the perſuaſive voice of benign philoſophy, nor with proper affections hear it lecture upon that divine adminiſtration which diffuſes infinite benevolence thro' the univerſe. Thus the virtuous mind is proved to be the beſt diſcerner of the beauty and goodneſs of providence. It is by the moral ſenſe only theſe can ever be truly admired: for one, void of a good ear, is not more incapable of judging in relation to the harmony of ſounds; or another of decency, who has no ſenſe of the decent and comely; than he is unqualified for reliſhing the excellencies of the divine adminiſtration, who is of an immoral temper, and deeply vitiated in his diſpoſition. It is then only the lover of virtue and truth, who is prepared for the reception of the nobleſt ſentiments concerning providence.

While I am thus writing to you upon the initiatory diſcipline, I am naturally led to recal ſome circumſtances attending *my* entrance into the ſeat of learning, to which you belong; the recollection of which is grateful to myſelf, and may be uſeful to you. The wiſe and benevolent *Euphraſius*, immediately after my

my admiſſion, not only recommended me to ſome ingenious youths, but alſo allowed me ſome hours of his company almoſt every day. His converſation was of ſuch a nature, as, without affectation, or any ſeverity in his principles, to confirm me in the love of virtue and truth, to which the juſtneſs and liberal turn of my preceding education in no ſmall meaſure contributed. One morning, when I was walking early under the piazzas in a thoughtful kind of ſolitude, *Euphraſtus* accoſted me in his graceful manner. After expreſſing his ſatisfaction to find I reliſhed the pleaſures of the morning, and had reſolution to redeem its inſtructive hours from ſleep, he put a paper into my hand, with the ſmile of goodneſs on his countenance, ſaying, he hoped that would not be unacceptable, for it was no other than an invocation that the fair morn of ſcience might dawn upon me. He added, it becomes you to make ſome ſuch invocation the language of your own heart. This was the prayer of initiation, which I have carefully preſerved, and ſhall here tranſcribe. " Supreme mind! unto thee who art the pa-
" rent of truth and goodneſs, I who am now
" entering on the moſt important ſtudies,
" humbly addreſs my prayer. Such are the
" powers

" powers of which I find my better nature
" poſſeſſed, that I am by theſe directed to
" look over the creation, in ſearch of the
" underived beauty. As in this ſearch I am
" no otherwiſe afraid of erring than thro' ir-
" regular paſſions, my humble prayer is this:
" Preſerve me, O God! from their pol-
" luting influences, that with an upright
" judgment, and moral chaſtity of diſpoſition,
" I may diſcern the fair proportions of truth,
" and emboſom the pureſt images of divine
" ſcience. O! let me not be a forlorn un-
" profitable wanderer thro' this region of
" moral literature I am now entering into.
" Inſpire me with the influences of thy own
" ſpirit, that theſe may conduct my inqui-
" ries to a happy end. Permit one friendly
" ray, beaming from thy intellectual nature,
" to irradiate my underſtanding, and illu-
" minate thoſe paths thro' which I go.
" Widely ſeparated from vice and folly, let
" thoſe beſt of principles ever influence my
" conduct, from whence ſpring religious
" praiſe, gratitude, benevolence, patriotiſm,
" and all the ornaments of moral life. Do
" thou, O father and friend of human kind!
" who diſpenſeſt thy wiſdom and goodneſs
" with liberality, guard me from the deluſion

" of bewildering fancies, increaſe my know-
" ledge of thy ways, harmonize my af-
" fections to the beauteous meaſures of duty,
" and ever regulate my zeal; that thus I may
" enjoy the calm approbation of conſcience,
" and my conduct not be diſhonourable, ei-
" ther in the ſight of mortal or immortal
" beings. Teach me to read thy perfections
" in the volume of nature, and then, by
" proper ſteps, to aſcend to the contempla-
" tion of thoſe truths, which are contained in
" the ſacred volume of inſpired theology.
" Open to my underſtanding fair and con-
" nective views of thy moral adminiſtration,
" that with the genuine warmth of devotion
" my voice may declare, great and wonder-
" ful are thy works, Lord God Almighty!
" juſt and true are thy ways! to whom be
" ſupreme homage, veneration, and praiſe,
" thro' eternal ages and worlds without end."
This was *Euphraſius*'s morning preſent; and I have at this time a pleaſing remembrance of the hearty reception I gave it. May it not be unwelcome to you. Prayer never appears with more gracefulneſs than when it is performed by youth, nor ever with greater dignity than when goodneſs and wiſdom are the objects of its requeſt.

You

You will review this ſummary recommendation of moral ſtudies. No compliment is paid them. From the excellency of their own nature, they are above all praiſe. In examining yourſelf, be honeſt, be impartial, with reſpect to the qualifications neceſſary to your graceful admittance into the moral ſchool. Ever remember, that a love of virtue is the moſt eſſential; and forget not the moſt becoming and excellent manner of expreſſing this divine paſſion, by ſincere and humble approaches to the eternal fountain of light, wiſdom, and benevolence. This is the way to make both the beſt knowledge and the beſt character your own.

I am your ſincere Friend, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

INTENT upon the ſubject you have led me into, I ſometimes riſe with the ſun; and, after paying my devotions to the intellectual ſource of light, immediately apply myſelf to philoſophic meditations. If you had not called upon me, I fear I ſhould have ſlumbered away theſe ſweet hours of prime. To you, therefore, I confeſs myſelf in ſome meaſure indebted, for ſeeing nature of late ſo frequently in her morning-dreſs, in which ſhe ever appears the moſt amiably engaging. The bluſh of the riſing ſun, the cooling zephyrs, and the ſweet odors which in the morning hours of ſpring are diffuſed abroad, contribute to enhance the pleaſure of contemplation. They enliven the powers of fancy, and ſhe is perceptibly regaled with the freſh-

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neſs of bloſſoms. In my morning-walk, I read over your letter, in which you intimate how very agreeable it would have been to you, if I had taken a more particular view of thoſe different ſources of error, which have ſo very much prevented the progreſs of knowledge. In this reſpect my judgment is ſo widely different from yours, that I am only afraid my letter was longer than it needed to have been. I did not intend it for an introduction to ſcience in general; and its deſign was too limited to admit of an enumeration of the principal cauſes of error. If you have a ſtrong inclination to be particularly informed about them, I would here obſerve by the way, that they are pointed out, as you will find in the former part of his *Novum Organum*, by that oracular genius Sir *Francis Bacon*. With a majeſty of wiſdom, ſuperior to the reſt of mankind, he appeared on the theatre of learning, like one led forth by the God of nature, to inveſtigate his works for the uſe and direction of his fellow-creatures, thro' all future ages. Refuſing to venerate names or ſyſtems, he ventured alone to attack the idols of ignorance, and raiſed upon their ruins one fair temple, where the true natural ſcience will be revered, till time ſhall be no more.

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That part of his writings, juſt now mentioned, I would adviſe you to read with the greateſt care. It is a moſt charming introduction to the ſtudy of wiſdom in general. The errors of the heart did not indeed come properly under his notice; for natural and not moral truths were the ſubjects of his inveſtigation. You tell me you have read over my letter, and have ſince been reading over your own heart; and that, unleſs you are unknowingly partial to yourſelf, there is nothing in it that ſhould prevent the admiſſion of moral truths. How beautiful is the bloom of virtue! may it be followed with the richeſt fruit in the progreſs of life.

PERMIT me now, *Mathetes*, to give you joy, in that you have gone thro' the moral forms of initiation, and have actually began to philoſophize concerning providence: Shall I invoke thoſe ſacred genii to direct your inquiries, who uſed in antient times oft to talk together on the banks of *Iliſſus*, and who, if ſtill converſing with men, haunt the ſeat of learning where you reſide? Rather may you hear the voice of that parent genius you have lately been addreſſing, and, led by his divine invitations, riſe thro' the aſcending ſcale of nature to the comprehenſion of an all-wiſe,

benevolent providence. If you once advance thus far, I doubt not you will proceed farther, and admire the chriſtian theology; for this is animated with the ſame ſpirit, and exhibits the faireſt, the moſt intereſting delineations of divine grace and truth. The moral plan of providence is the true foundation of religious belief, tho' in no meaſure the limitation of it; for a right underſtanding of this leads on to the grateful admiration of the divine plan of redemption, and the bleſſed immortality of the righteous. What you aſk of me, is aſſiſtance in the ſtudy of the Deity and his providential conduct; aſſure yourſelf, I am ready to give you all the ſatisfaction on this ſubject which is in my power. With this view I would here offer to your conſideration the following obſervations, which, ſtrictly attended to, may obviate ſome doubts, and facilitate your reception of moral knowledge. The firſt and moſt natural obſervation is,

" That providence has greatly ſuffered by " partial and injudicious commentaries upon " it." In many of theſe, not ſo much as its reigning, benevolent deſign, has been attended to, or clearly eſtabliſhed; much leſs have they illuſtrated the harmony of its parts as contributing to that grand deſign, or thoſe proportions

portions in its under-movements, which, on account of their chaſte and natural alliance to it, claim the admiration of every well-diſpos'd mind. It is but ſeldom we find the conſtitution of things truly explained and rationally vindicated. On this ſubject the public religious ſtyle is not uſually ſo honourable as it ought to be. We are turned over perpetually from one miſery to another, without ever being directed to conſider the general laws of nature, or ſo much as once bid to ſtudy the rational explanation of life's adverſities. If we obſerve the dark colours made uſe of by many in their drawing the aſpect of nature, they will appear to be ſuch as deprive her features of their uſual benignity, ſuch as exclude that complacential ſmile with which nature was born, and with which external mark of felicity ſhe has always appeared. If we take notice of the apparent violence ſhe has received from many writers, whoſe compoſitions are moſt directly calculated to exaggerate human miſeries, and give the worſt view of things; if we remark the conduct of ſuch authors with any degree of reflection, we ſhall not wonder that by them the counter-part is forgotten, and the fair ſide of providence concealed. Few of thoſe pieces we are favoured

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with on this ſubject deſerve the title of candid and liberal expoſitions. That this obſervation is not ſatyrical, impartial reaſon, upon a free examination of providence, will be fully convinced. It is plain that ſuch writers have been doing the greateſt prejudice to the doctrine of providence; for,

" To ſupport the amiableneſs of the di-
" vine adminiſtration, it is certainly incum-
" bent upon us to vindicate preſent meaſures."
It is incumbent upon us, to ſhew the ſcheme to be good which the great author of nature has executed, and that harmony and benevolence reign thro' this part of the univerſe which we inhabit; otherwiſe we muſt be thrown into deſpairing ſcepticiſm, and confirmed in that ill opinion of things, which is to be abſolutely hopeleſs. The promiſe of all turning out well at laſt, if nothing is well at preſent, can give no ſatisfaction. If what really is, is wrong, the promiſe of what will be, being right, looks too much like good-humoured fiction, and the mere fable of pleaſure. The queſtion which here naturally ariſes is this: How comes the preſent ſcheme to be wrong? Not by chance, it is confeſſed by every nominal theiſt. Then, if in conſequence of the divine intention, I aſk, How

can that mind, which has once designed wrong, alter its judgment, antecedent to an alteration of measures in any future time; when it always perceives things in the same light, and in point of wisdom, power, or goodness, cannot possibly admit of any improvement? It would be an open dishonouring of the Deity to call the present scheme the rude draught, or unfinished essay, of creating power: and any such language is not more profane than it is unphilosophical; for emendations are founded upon some defect in the agent, and spring from it. Consummate virtue and infinite knowledge, aided by the arm of omnipotence, cannot therefore fail of making their work perfect. Yet there are those who, not rightly considering, how certain evil appearances are reconcileable with the rectitude of those general determinations of providence, which give room for them, injudiciously apologize in behalf of the Creator, by saying, things were not originally designed to turn out as they have done. Not that he was disappointed; for this, they are sensible, would be to speak of God in a style thoroughly contemptible. These evils are then in consequence of his permission; and thus they think the difficulty, in regard to them, is removed.

But

But it is not thus the ſagacious inquirer ſees himſelf releaſed from the neceſſity of vindicating the ways of the Almighty. We muſt ſay this permiſſion was, in the opinion of clear and unpolluted reaſon, determined upon, as the beſt for the whole; ſince to permit that which is abſolutely wrong, when there is an ability to prevent it, is to deviate from the moral purity of action. Wherefore we cannot, conſiſtently with the honour of his character, ſuppoſe the Deity would ſuffer any power or law to take place in his creation, but ſuch, the fulleſt and moſt extenſive effects of which were foreſeen, and ſuch as for good reaſons was preferred to any other which could be ſubſtituted in its room. To imagine the contrary, would be arguing, as you eaſily perceive, from our own weakneſs and folly. We may ſometimes thro' paſſion, or in an ill humour, conſent to things which our judgments, in a ſedate and virtuous hour, would highly condemn; but the ſupreme being ever poſſeſſes his virtue and wiſdom undiſturbed. It then follows, from this train of reaſoning, that the divine permiſſion is with deſign, and conſequently that it is as obligatory upon us, in order to ſupport the uniform rectitude of his conduct, to juſtify the author of nature in

what he has permitted, as to juſtify that which he has decreed. A partial vindication of the frame and government of the univerſe is not much more than demoniſm. True religious faith undertakes the defence of the entire adminiſtration: and the fair rule of examination, in order to approve or condemn, is as follows.

" If we are called to judge of any thing " which cannot be cloſely examined through- " out, for inſtance, a ſyſtem of policy, a " ſtructure, or a character, from the leading " principle, the prevailing taſte and general " diſpoſition, ſo far as theſe are laid open to " our inſpection, we muſt form our opinions " of thoſe parts belonging to them which are " concealed from us." If the judgment of the mechanic is required, concerning the internal workmanſhip of any complex machine, which he cannot have the privilege of examining then with an inquiſitive eye, he looks over the external ſtructure, and narrowly inſpects the mechaniſm of the ſprings and movements under his obſervation. If he finds theſe were made by a bad hand, ſo defective both in workmanſhip and contrivance, as not to anſwer the end for which they were apparently calculated; and farther, that they are

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of as real importance to the machine's working well, as the ſecret wheels and inmoſt parts of it; then he is no ſooner informed that the ſame artificer made the whole, but he condemns the work, and muſt have a low opinion of that which is concealed.

To this given rule, or manner of paſſing judgment from compariſon and analogy, none can have better claim than the natural philoſopher in giving his opinion of the works of nature; or than the moraliſt who takes an eſtimate of providence, and wants to know the moral character of the government he is under. If the ſtructure of the earth, ſo far as it is expoſed to the examination of the former, and the leſſer forms and bodies which he can bring within the ſphere of cloſe inſpection, are ill-contrived; if the latter alſo diſcovers the plan of nature, as it has relation to the ſeveral beings included in it, to be explicitely calculated for infelicity, then both of them will paſs the ſame judgment upon the mechaniſm of another planet and the ſtate of its inhabitants, even of the whole ſolar ſyſtem and the univerſe itſelf. For if there is reaſon to believe one being is the author of all, they cannot but fear the whole is miſerable, and ill-formed.

THIS law of trial, or examining principle, draws after it the following conſequences.

BY admitting that there is more confuſion and miſrule, than there is of regularity and government in nature; and that it is rather a deformed heap of things, than any well-meditated ſyſtem, the inference is directly drawn in favour of atheiſm; and the utmoſt that can be done, is only to maintain partial theiſm, till the conceſſion be retracted. Here the argument *a priori* can give no ſatisfaction; and it would be great weakneſs to imagine recourſe may be had to revelation, ſince the exiſtence of an all-governing mind muſt be antecedently proved, and the truth of his perfections pre-eſtabliſhed.

BY granting that order and diſorder in the natural world, that miſery and happineſs in the ſenſitive and moral world, reſult from original laws, equally well directed to produce theſe as their proper ends, and by acknowledging their tendencies, are abſolutely inconſiſtent with one general uniform purſuit, we do of neceſſity introduce the doctrine of manicheiſm. Every being poſſeſſed of a moral character, muſt be either benevolent in its nature, or the reverſe; and if the laws of nature and providence were in part as directly

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conſtituted for evil, as elſewhere for producing good, ſo that the whole could not be the workmanſhip of one agent acting conſiſtently with himſelf; on this ſuppoſition the underſtanding would moſt rationally incline to the belief of the *Manicheans*, of two ſelf-exiſtent principles oppoſite in their nature, and ever claſhing in their meaſures. It is indeed difficult to account for the exiſtence either of harmony or diſcord, either of good or evil, upon this hypotheſis; for we cannot aſſign any reaſon why a wiſe and good being ſhould chuſe to create any ſum, for inſtance five degrees of happineſs, rather than annihilate five degrees of miſery; that is, the affirming, that happineſs and miſery are ſupported by contrary laws of equal energy thro' the univerſe, perplexes the underſtanding in accounting for creation by any ſcheme whatever. Tho' admitting the affirmation true, the *Manichean* philoſopher ſeems to be neareſt the truth.

But if a unity of deſign is proved from the works of creation, and if their connective dependencies ſhew they are parts of one entire ſyſtem; if we ſee one prevailing ſcope, and the ſeveral parts yielding to conſpire with the general intereſt, then the doctrine of the unity is firmly eſtabliſhed, and

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the opinion of one univerſal mind muſt prevail. If the univerſal tenor is proved good, the goodneſs of this ſupreme mind is demonſtrated; if the univerſal tenor is bad, it is the ſtrongeſt proof of a reigning malevolence and ill-diſpoſition.

THUS, from ſuch different ſyſtems, ſhould we differently characterize their authors. Thus, from nature's prevailing laws and tendency, ſo far as theſe are diſcoverable to us, we extend our inferences to the firſt cauſe of all things. This we do as by unanimous conſent, and agree in our general concluſion, that he who made the world is infinite in his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs. And thus far of one mind, what can be more ſtrange than that we ſhould afterwards divide in our ſentiments about the creation? Certainly from this our common faith, in the perfections of the ſupreme lord of nature, we muſt directly infer, the exiſtence of the moſt compleat, univerſal ſyſtem of good; a ſyſtem not formed upon any partial and contracted principles, but one ſo generouſly plann'd out, as to contain within its various provinces all poſſible orders of being, both for numbers and degree of happineſs, incapable of any farther addition, when its intire intereſt, in its ultimate proceſs,

is conſidered. Such then, if we deviate not from our avowed religious principles, we muſt believe the preſent conſtitution of things to be. An univerſe, profoundly awful for its immenſity, and for the grandeur of its ſtructure, juſtly venerated, as a moſt worthy viſible monument of the unſeen and eternal mind. An univerſe, in the correctneſs and harmony of its diſpoſitions, conſtructed with inimitable ſkill, and ſo elegantly ornamented with the fineſt ſtrokes of art, as to be to us now, and to all intelligent creatures in every period of time, the true ſource of that genuine criticiſm, by which inferior performances, and all productions of genius, to whatever ſcience they belong, are to be examined. An univerſe, ſuſceptible of no changes, but ſuch as accord with the laws of pre-eſtabliſhed harmony, moving through every variation, reſponſive to the ſacred orders of heaven. How propitious and hoſpitable its regions! conſtantly repleniſhed with his bounty who firſt ſpread them through illimitable ſpace, and ever flouriſhing with all the delights and graces with which felicity can be arrayed! In them vice only is doomed to inevitable miſery; and from them, ere long, it will be exiled by the command of ſovereign goodneſs,

and totally exterminated. The wiſe and virtuous walk forth to contemplate the different parts of the amazing plan. Peace and tranquillity attend their ſteps; and as they increaſe in knowledge, their gratitude becomes more ardent, and their praiſes more ſublime. While placed in the inferior provinces of nature, they enjoy a happineſs of the moſt genuine kind; yet fairer and better proſpects await them through futurity in an infinite progreſſion.

Now if this train of reaſoning is ſober and juſt, it muſt be acknowledged to be very ſurprizing to hear ſo many perſons of learning and virtue perpetually ſtammering out the ſeeming faults in the real conſtitution of nature, as if we were liable at every ſtep to fall into miſery, and to be affrighted with diſtortions in every proſpect. I cannot but wonder, that any ſhould delight to be ever ſermonizing upon imagined irregularities in nature, to be ever ſearching for her miſtakes, and ever lecturing on the works of God in the ſour libel-ſtrain, as if on purpoſe to make us out of humour with the world. When theſe ſhattered rapſodies are over, when the head is cool, and diſpoſed for impartial reaſoning, and the heart benevolent and good, ſuch

ſuch perſons ought ſeriouſly to conſider the drift of theſe repreſentations. What inference can be drawn from them comfortable to ourſelves? or what deduction honourable to the great author of nature? Is this confuſion our laſt reſort? And are we like perſons of deſperate fortunes, who can only hope to raiſe their private intereſt from public anarchy and miſrule? Certainly this manner of deſcribing nature cannot be thought the beſt way of introducing gracefully any religious application; for in proportion as it darkens human life, the wiſe will hereby be leſs reconciled to the approach of death. The goodneſs of God is the only ſolid and rational ſupport in the laſt hour; and if this perfection is not conſpicuous in the general methods of divine adminiſtration, the moſt virtuous muſt be overwhelmed with the oppreſſive dread of a future ſtate. Where then is the comfortable inference in this life, or hereafter? How is virtue relieved? or how is religion aided by drawing the preſent conſtitution of things thus ill-featured, and deſcribing nature as convulſed in every part, and pained even to diſtortion? Is divine wiſdom beautifully delineated in ſuch avowed deformities? Is infinite intelligence moſt clearly

monſtrated from ſuch broken and undigeſted meaſures? or is the goodneſs of the Deity in the beſt manner recommended from ſcenes of the darkeſt complexion, which tend rather to diſcourage than to inſpire with chearfulneſs and truſt? Is the moral character of the moſt high adminiſtrator thus raiſed, or even ſupported? If not, where now are the ſources of genuine piety? Where now are thoſe exalted ſentiments which dignify the human mind? Where is that devotion which corrects and transforms the paſſions? That devotion which is animated by ſacred love and religious admiration of the ſupreme beauty, is hence deprived of thoſe principles which can alone ſupport theſe ſacred paſſions. Is our piety then to degenerate into external forms? to be unanimated as the grave? and we turn ſycophants in religion? *abeſte profani.* One of the ancients, I mean *Epictetus,* who has written in the moſt practical ſtrain upon religion, and its excellent influence on life, of any in the heathen world, particularly ſhewing how it diſciplines the mind into contentment and reſignation, takes care to inform his diſciples, " That right ſentiments concerning " the divine nature form the baſis of true re- " ligion in the human mind; to believe God " is,

" is, and that he governs the univerſe with " rectitude and goodneſs, is the foundation " of religion: and being thus confirmed in " favour of the ſupreme order, we are, in " obedience to the Deity, called to yield to " the prevailing tenor, and to fall in with " the general direction of things, firmly per- " ſuaded, that this direction is ever guided " by the beſt mind." This principle is, in its natural influence, continually reconciling to the events of life; and muſt, when rightly underſtood, prevent the voice of complaint. It is the nobleſt and beſt, it is indeed the only ſolid principle which we have to rely on, amidſt the viciſſitudes of things: and, in ſpite of all the injuſtice done to the divine providential conduct, yet, from the government of nature, the validity of this principle remains apparently demonſtrable.

On a review of this laſt paragraph, I imagine you will begin to think I grow warm: poſſibly you may be in ſome pain for me, leſt I ſhould proceed too precipitately; though, in reality, I am now ſeated in my garden under a pleaſant ſhade, where I am always wont to be the moſt ſerenely contemplative, and was never more fully in poſſeſſion of myſelf than at preſent. Perhaps

I am more ſenſible of the injuries which are done to nature, and more diſpleaſed with them in this delightful evening, than I ſhould be at ſome other time. Her aſpect is calm, and ſoftened with benignity. The ſweetneſſes of intermingled flowers and bloſſoms impregnate her breath, and I confeſs myſelf this moment to be ſmitten with her faſcinating charms. The evening hour, which uſually in this fine ſeaſon of the year I devote to walking forth into the fields, now calls me. My thoughts are inclined to ramble abroad, and to break off for a while their philoſophical attention, that hereafter they may return to it with more pleaſure. In the mean time,

My dear friend, adieu, &c.

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LETTER III:

WHAT ſtill, *Mathetes*, diſtracted with gloomy thoughts! Yes. I verily believe your laſt was indited at a time when you were ſtrongly under their influence. In the very ſtyle of it there is a kind of funeral ſolemnity; and I have read more chearful expreſſions of reſignation on the countenance of a widow in her weeds, than I can poſſibly find in your letter, after the moſt careful peruſal. Though I am years older than you are; though I have been long ſince obliged to leave thoſe peaceful retreats of the muſes where you reſide, and where I once enjoyed an undiſturbed tranquillity; and though I have ſince trod the leſs eligible paths of open life, in which many occurrences fail not to occaſion perplexity and diſquietude; yet under theſe diſadvantages I in good earneſt believe, that, of the two, I have the moſt pleaſantry at heart.

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This you cannot account for by any advantage of natural temper, ſince your own was undeniably of a chearful complexion; neither is there, according to your own confeſſion, any external cauſe to be aſſigned for it. The difference is occaſioned by our different ſentiments. I think well of nature's adminiſtration; and am in good ſpirits: you are diffident about it; and this diffidence creates ſuſpicion and a ſtrain of diſmal apprehenſions. Well, for your ſake, I will once more enter the liſts againſt thoſe authors who have done you ſo much real injury, by detracting from the wiſdom and benevolence of the divine adminiſtration.

HAD the deformed repreſentations they have given of providence anſwered ſome moſt deſirable purpoſes, they could not have been more boldly drawn, or with ſtronger features of miſery; though, as I have ſhewn, ſuch repreſentations, in their natural influence, detract from the charms of virtue, impair the true grandeur of religion, and moulder away the moſt rational principles of happineſs. Theſe their pernicious conſequences are reaſons abundantly ſufficient to forbid our fondneſs for them, and to deter us from giving ſuch gloomy images any place in our minds;

eſpecially if at as cheap a rate, and in an honeſter way, we can come at ſome livelier colouring, and by the pencil of truth be preſented with a "more delightful and happy picture of things." It is true we muſt take things as they are, and deſcribe the world as we find it. I agree to it, and am fully perſuaded a candid examination of the divine works will ſhew that "the ſower, complaining "paraphraſts loſe the ſpirit, connection, and "elegance of the fair original." Their coarſe portraits are not taken from nature or real life. So far are they from giving us its diſtinct features with any degree of delicacy and exactneſs, that even the complexion of providence is not preſerved in many of their compoſitions. In order to advance gradually towards the proof of this, it will not be improper to inquire into the cauſes of ſuch unfavourable accounts of providence. When theſe are laid open, a fair and juſt deſcription of it will be looked upon without any ſuſpicions. You ſee then how your thoughts are to be employed for a while, ſince this ſeems to me the proper place for making

" An inquiry into the grounds and reaſons
" of thoſe miſrepreſentations which have been
" given of nature and providence."

It may well diſcourage you to find many authors, of no inferior abilities, exhibiting dark pictures of human life; and not of human life only, but even of providence at large; eſpecially when, with the greateſt ſerioufneſs, they treat theſe ſubjects in this manner; and that, not upon a haſty ſuperficial view of them, but with much previous thought, after they have enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education, and gone through morals and divinity in a regular courſe of ſtudies. That men ſhould diſpute on particular phænomena in the phyſical and moral world; that they ſhould even ſometimes be at a loſs to explain their uſes and good tendency with entire ſatisfaction to themſelves, is no other than what may reaſonably be expected, ſince the littleneſs of the human underſtanding cannot fully comprehend the relative views and purpoſes they are intended to ſubſerve. But to hear the information we can acquire of the Deity from his works, differently determined upon and repreſented by many as extreamly uncertain; to hear it denied, that this is ſuch, as clearly to demonſtrate goodneſs to be the ſpring of his actions, and

and the communication of happineſs and enjoyment, the primary and ſupreme end of creation, is indeed greatly ſurprizing: for nothing can be more obvious to impartial reaſon, than that the benignity with which nature is every where inſpired, abſolutely condemns ſuch a denial, as altogether abſurd and groundleſs. That you and I, *Mathetes*, ſhould come into life ſo late in the day, after ſo many polite and inquiring ages; that we ſhould have ſtill, uneraſed by time, ſeveral fine remains of their moral reaſoning upon the rectitude of the univerſe; that we ſhould be farther bleſſed with a fair and divine delineation of the goodneſs of providence, where a variety of its afflictive ſcenes are explained through ſeveral national periods in the true ſacred hiſtory, and their moral uſes and direct religious intentions pointed out to our view; and yet, after all, be diſturbed with ſuch harſh and uncomfortable diſputations, muſt ſeem to you very odd and difficult to account for.

Be aſſured from hence, my friend, the beſt uſe has not been made of theſe aſſiſtances; otherwiſe our eſtimations of providence would have been more juſt and more honourable.

That they are not ſo, is to be imputed, in the firſt place,

" To the baleful influences of ſuperſti-
" tion." We are yet haunted with the Δεισιδαιμονια, and the terrifying apprehenſions naturally reſulting from it are ſtill prevalent amongſt us. The mock ſolemnity of ſuperſtitious rites and ceremonies was perhaps never, ſince this iſland was firſt inhabited, more univerſally deſpiſed than at preſent; yet many, who contemn ſuperſtition in its external forms, give it admittance when it comes ſolitary and undreſſed. There are certain modes and rituals which always appear when her influence is predominant, and her intereſt becomes nationally eſtabliſhed; but theſe do not conſtitute her nature. We are allowed to pay our gloomy devoirs at her ſhrine, without going through the full courſe of ridiculous external obſervances: and however this nation may diſlike her dreſs, it continues to be too familiar with her perſon. The truth is, that great numbers among us are ſtrangely wrought upon and agitated by her power. Certainly every one who conſiders the divine government as an enlarged tyranny, every one who looks upon the Deity as implacable, every one who imagines there is no other meaſure

meaſure of the divine conduct than a mere arbitrary will; certainly, I ſay, every ſuch perſon is thoroughly ſuperſtitious and gives into an opinion which effaces all amiable ideas of deity: an opinion leſs eligible than atheiſm; and as it not only obliterates our hope of happineſs in futurity, but eſtabliſhes eternal tyranny and malevolence, is unqueſtionably more terrifying. How many, by a formidable and unamiable opinion of the creator, have their underſtandings ſuperſtitiouſly enthralled! We may obſerve ſeveral even of thoſe who have been directly and in form devoted to the contemplative life, whoſe ſpeculations nevertheleſs are deeply tainted with its infection. You know our national character cannot be honeſtly drawn without its melancholy feature; we are naturally rather a dejected than a gay people. Our very conſtitutional kind of philoſophy wears its mourning garb, and is of the ſorrowful complexion. It is not therefore to be wondered at, that perſons naturally of this caſt, with an almoſt inſeparable gloomineſs of diſpoſition hanging about them, eſpecially if undiſciplined in the exerciſes of moral philoſophy, ſhould have their ſpirits thrown into a very benighted ſituation. This will be almoſt ſure to happen when the lightnings flaſh,

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the thunders roar, and tempeſts deſcend with violence. Our long and dark winter nights are often found ſufficient to produce this effect, in perſons thus diſpoſed and circumſtanced. But however ſubject the common people may be to falſe alarms from their ignorance of nature, it might be reaſonably expected that the ſtudy of natural and moral wiſdom ſhould make us more manly and confident. It is not ſufficient ſome particular ſuperſtitions are grown out of date; ſo long as the ſullen and arbitrary goddeſs maintains her empire within, we are unhappy. While our thoughts are under her ſurly and affrighting influence they cannot be ſedate nor good temper'd enough to philoſophize with comelineſs, ingenuity, and connection. Tho' we go thro' the ſeveral ſtages of learning, yet if we are all the while ſurrounded with ſuperſtitious darkneſs, our minds will, after all, be fetter'd and enſlav'd, and will be ſure to give thoſe deſcriptions of providence, which they draw, a tincture of their own baſeneſs and illiberality. If the ſtarts of an affrighted imagination do not make them in the higheſt degree irregular, they will however have the down-caſt look, and want the enlivening of a thoroughly ingenuous ſpirit; whereas true knowledge of the Deity is neceſſarily con-

connected with the nobleſt freedom of ſoul; it inſpires with the hopes of virtue, but never degenerates into a ſervile temper.

Thus, in inquiring after the occaſions of thoſe unfair repreſentations that have been given of the viſible conſtitution of things, I firſt mention ſuperſtition. From this general view of it you will readily diſcern the great influence it has in leading many into wrong ſentiments on this ſubject. Of ſuch ſentiments it is indeed the principal cauſe; others, which may be aſſigned, are ſubordinate; and ſome of them have ſo cloſe a connection with ſuperſtition, that you are not to wonder if, intermingled with them, it ſhould come hereafter under your conſideration. To proceed in our preſent enquiry. When we are preſented in ſleep with a dark night-piece of ſtorms, precipices, and ſhipwrecks, or think our ſelves ſurrounded with ruins, tombs, and apparitions, we ſtartle upon our bed, and tremble under the moſt dreadful apprehenſions of danger; but we no ſooner awake, and repoſſeſs the government of our own imaginations, than theſe deformities immediately vaniſh. Of the ſame imaginary nature are thoſe diſmembered draughts of providence which have been ſo frequently preſented to our view; they are the dreams of me-

melancholy complexioned minds, the effects of warm imagination, not regulated by wise religious knowledge, the natural language of self-vitiousness and malignity; or occasion'd by a love of novelty and the desire of surprizing others. It would be easy to shew how each of these has injured the cause of providence, and the reason there is to fear they will too often operate in this manner. This I shall now briefly attempt, in order to clear the divine oeconomy from unjust aspersions.

As to a mind "shrouded with melancholy" it is like the eye, when so particularly disordered as to discolour all objects with its own distemper, it cannot look into any subjects of contemplation without throwing something of its own cast upon them, by which it perpetually deceives itself. Such a mind gives every thing the gloomy aspect, it vails the innocent, it darkens the chearful scenes of life, and spreads a dreary shade over the most enlivened beauties in nature. When it is thus hung with mourning, complaints, fears and despair claim sovereign right to the possession of it, and all gay ideas are banished from their comfortless dominions. If the sun is gone down, and the man is dark in himself, it is no wonder he startles with night-monsters, and given over to the power of a distemper'd

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imagination is loſt to all hope and joy. Reaſon thus dethron'd, no change of place can afford him the leaſt relief; he is diſſatisfied with every ſituation; trivial circumſtances are turn'd into inſtruments of divine vengeance, and the apprehenſion of ſome evil or another ariſes from every thing he ſees or hears: all nature is againſt him. Suſpicion is the child of a melancholy temper, and from foſtering and indulging it, diſtruſt of deity enſues. Thus is this dark caſt of thought naturally accounted for. Again;

" A warm imagination, inflamed with con-
" troverſy, and not directed by ſound religious
" knowledge, has occaſion'd many to ſpeak of
" the divine works in a manner utterly in-
" conſiſtent with the rules of fair and candid in-
" terpretation." Modeſt and good tempered *Mathetes*, I am in no pain for you upon this head, having no apprehenſions that ſuch ill examples can by any means infect you, who have been accuſtomed ſo very lately to the cloſe and philoſophic manner of ſtudying nature: in conſequence of which, you have informed me, the ſeveral laws in the phyſical world, and the reſpective forces with which they act on natural bodies, appear to you wiſe and good; you have been led from your own obſervations, as well as the ingenious commentaries of others, to

conſider the ſtructure and mechaniſm of theſe bodies as the performances of inimitable art. Now where the underſtanding is not perverted in early life by imbibing falſe opinions, a knowledge of the laws, proportions, and forms of nature, fixes the mind in an high opinion of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the deity. This natural is a proper introduction to that nobler philoſophy which is moral and religious. I do not ſuſpect you, *Mathetes*, of being influenced by preconceived ill opinions of the natural world, or of repreſenting it as convulſed and broken, to ſupport any theological favorite hypotheſis with a degree of rigour both unwiſe and unſcriptural; yet this many have done; they have let their imaginations looſe, and employed all their artifice and power to injure the connections of nature. In their wild fury they have ſpread round an imaginary horror, and ſlandered the works of the creator. They have gravely declared againſt beauty and order, as if regular proceſſes and harmonious operations were not ſo much for the advantage of religious belief, as the rudeſt chaſms and moſt diſcordant meaſures. Thus many, from wrong notions and a miſguided zeal, are ſtrongly prepoſſeſſed in favour of irregular and marvellous events; eſteeming theſe as the beſt proofs

proofs of a ſovereign adminiſtration. Their language is of this ſort: " Men may be atheiſts " in the ſtill calm of life and regular ſucceſſion " of things; while the ſun ſhines upon them with " its benign chearfulneſs and warmth; while the " heavens are uniform in their motions, and pre- " ſent no ſtrange phenomena to their view; while " the year ſupplies their wants with its returning " bounty, and their ſituations are undiſturbed, " peaceful, and happy, it is no wonder, if in all " this eaſe of circumſtances, they grow forgetful " of nature's ſupreme governor. With ſo much " order and goodneſs about them they will be " apt to do ſo; but when the violent tempeſt in " a kind of fury ſhakes the habitations of men, " and threatens to break thro' thoſe laws of or- " der by which the heavens themſelves are go- " verned; or when the plague, famine, and " war, with their dreary ſteps, walk forth into " human ſocieties in a thouſand miſerable ap- " pearances, who can be a ſpectator of theſe, " and not own a reigning deity?" I anſwer, no ſcenes of this miſerable and convulſive kind are introduced, but ſuch as are upon the whole conſiſtent with the wiſe and good government of the univerſe. Theſe alſo, it may be expected, ſhould awake the thoughtleſs into attention, and ſolemnize their views from a ſenſe

of the divine omnipotence; yet every wiſe man is firſt ſettled in the doctrine of theiſm from the well eſtabliſhed order of things. Herein the wiſdom of God appears the moſt admirable, and his goodneſs the moſt conſpicuous. I farther reply, that thoſe exertions of power which are neceſſary to preſerve the connections of the univerſe, are not leſs demonſtrative of divine omnipotence, than even ſuch energies as ſhould agonize every part of nature, and tumble the whole into a ruin. Could we ſee the creation rent to pieces, it would not be a ſtronger proof of the divine power than we have at preſent, while this power is regulated by wiſdom, and employ'd in the adminiſtration of extenſive univerſal good. Let the appeal then be made to ſober reaſon: ſhall we acknowledge the ruling deity, when there appears deſtructive alterations in the frame of things, and not acknowledge him in the orderly courſe of nature which is ſo productive of felicity? Shall we acknowledge him in thunder, ſtorms, and tempeſts, and not in the ſerene and temperate ſeaſons? Shall we acknowledge him when nature is ſhook with violent earthquakes, and not do it when ſhe is regular and placid in her motions? Is it natural to venerate God in darkneſs, and is it not as natural for us

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to proclaim his goodneſs when the light ſhineth abroad? Is it reaſonable to reverence him, when the peſtilence is deſtroying mankind; and is it not reaſonable to praiſe him, when, inſtead of prevailing ſickneſs, our youth for the moſt part are adorn'd with the bloom of health, and the far greater number even of the aged enjoy its eaſe and ſweetneſs? Is it reaſonable to pray unto him when the meagre famine deforms the aſpects and conſtitutions of the inferior creatures, and is it not reaſonable to direct our expreſſions of gratitude, admiration, and love to this great parent of good, when fair ſcenes ſmile around us on every hand, when all looks well and we are flouriſhing in the midſt of plenty? Indeed the common people have been always remarkable for the greateſt ſhew of religion in miſerable times: the obſervations is old, *ſigna dedi veniſſe Deum vulguſque precari*. This only ſhews how ſtrongly and univerſally the ſenſe of a higher nature is implanted in human breaſts, when thoſe who are the leaſt accuſtomed to contemplative theology are ſurrounded with natural appearances to them altogether ſtrange and terrifying, they have immediate recourſe to the deity. Thus alſo when miſeries blacken round them they deprecate his diſpleaſure, and humbly aſk his gracious

protection. The very ſame we ſee in mens conduct towards one another; when in diſtreſs they will implore the aſſiſtance of thoſe old benefactors whom they ſcarcely thought of while in happy and eaſy circumſtances. That men ſhould implore the favour of the almighty in the midſt of calamities is perfectly right; but then the not doing it in the midſt of enjoyments muſt be at leaſt equally wrong. They certainly believed in God and providence when they were thus comfortably ſituated, ſince it is not eaſy to conceive how a miſerable reverſe of fortune could form a proof of an all-preſiding mind to them, if this was before wanting. In ſome caſes the weaker argument may convince when the ſtronger would be ineffectual; but in the preſent inſtance, the diſparity of evidence is ſo great, and alſo ſo level to all capacities, that we cannot imagine this to be often the caſe. Let perſonal evils, let tremendous appearances be never ſo remarkable, or, if you pleaſe, moſt miraculouſly circumſtanced, how can theſe rationally recover from atheiſm, if the dignity of that power which ſuſtains the order of the general ſyſtem, if the univerſal harmony which connects the ſeveral parts of the creation, if the diffuſive goodneſs which is felt every where inſpiring

the whole; if theſe united conſiderations are not allowed to form a demonſtration of a governing deity? God dwells no more in clouds and darkneſs, than he does in the clear ſky and broad day-light; if we are not ſenſible of his preſence in an harmonious adminiſtration, how can we expect to diſcern it in one that is confuſed and monſtrous? If we feel not his influence in the good, we cannot feel it in the miſery of life; and that mind muſt be unſuſceptible of any ingenuous impreſſions, which owns it in the hoarſe blaſt and pinching froſts of winter, but confeſſes it not in the breath nor ſees it in the beauteous verdure of the ſpring. Darkneſs, thunder, whirlwinds, earthquakes, comets, and whatever elſe, thro' ignorance of the laws of nature, have been looked upon as ominous and malevolent phenomena, theſe have ſcared men into ſuperſtition; but the belief of a God is prior to theſe, and took its riſe from viewing the energies of well regulated power, and from the fair delineations of divine wiſdom and goodneſs diſcoverable in all the works of nature: and while theſe impreſſions, while theſe characters remain unraſed, a good opinion of the divinity can never be obliterated from the ſoul of man. Superſtition, with all its ſervile rites, ſprings from ignominious fear;

but

but religion claims a much nobler birth. It is the offspring of love, and dwells with truth, harmony, and benevolence. Religion is in its influences ſerene and fortifying; thus it irradiates the human ſoul with chearfulneſs and light, inſpires with ſupreme love of the divine mind, and reconciles to the meaſures of providence, as being on the whole perfectly good; and as ſuch it is impoſſible it ſhould ever take its riſe from chaotic and diſorder'd ſcenes. One who thinks that theſe prevail in the world, is in the direct way to atheiſm; and if he ſhuns this forlorn hopeleſs opinion, he is ſure to be tormented with that ſpecies of enthuſiaſm which creates ſuſpicion and religious melancholy. The true genuine religion is eſtabliſhed on the belief of a ſuperintendant and benign deity; thus it inſpires with praiſe, confidence, and reſignation. It proceeds from an inattention to theſe conſiderations, and from neglecting duly to poiſe them in the ſcale of reaſon, that any are ſo ſtrangely prepoſſeſſed in favour of convulſive ſhocks and terrible phenomena, as if they were the beſt proofs of providence, or, as if true religious ſentiments were connected with miſerable irregularities more than with the harmonies of goodneſs. Thus ſome, with a miſguided religious zeal, have eſpouſed ſuch

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an hypotheſis concerning the preſent conſtitution of things, as to ſpeak of fine natural contrivances as the fragments of a diſjointed world. There is another way not yet mentioned, in which religious zeal has operated to the injury of the preſent adminiſtration of providence; for many have been led incautiouſly to depretiate it, in order to make the contraſt ſtronger when they have attempted to raiſe the affections to a higher ſtate. In fervent aſpirations after the heavenly world, it is no wonder the preſent one ſhould have been ſpoke of in a ſtyle low and diminutive. This may be done in the flights of an enthuſiaſm, altogether genuine and unaffected; yet ſurely ſhe ought to be chaſtiſed for taking this liberty, and never complimented with applauſe, when thus paſſing the boundaries of reaſon ſhe tramples under foot the principles of divine philoſophy. A decent regard to the lord of nature, requires us to do juſtice to our ſituation here below; and this may be done without the leaſt tendency to impede our progreſs to the higher manſions of the bleſſed. The warm devotional rhapſodiſt, when elevating his thoughts far above this inferior ſyſtem, is in danger of taking his leave of it for a time with ſome expreſſions of incivility. Burn-

ing with celeſtial ardor, and as already in ſight of the immortal regions, he ſpurns his native ſoil, and depretiating its tranſitory pleaſures, looks down upon the world with a degree of contempt and abhorrence. If while thus circumſtanced, heaven and earth are brought into compariſon, the latter is almoſt ſure of meeting with hard uſage and vilifying expreſſions. But why thus ungrateful to the earth, which ſo faithfully ſupplies our returning wants, and is ever fruitful in multiplying the bleſſings of her offspring? Thus to ſatyrize the preſent, is no qualification for an honourable admiſſion into the future world; and of ſuch a conduct both earth and heaven have reaſon to complain; the former for being treated with the higheſt injuſtice and ingratitude, and the latter for being thus deprived of that unrivalled glory which it lays claim to upon the moſt fair and equitable conſiderations: for its enjoyments are the moſt durable, the moſt intenſe, and the moſt refined: and it is only there the benignity of the divine nature beams continually with full direction and unclouded luſtre.

I might trace the ill conſequences of miſtaken religious zeal through many other particulars; but ſuch obſervations would lead me too far;

and

and from what has been already ſaid, you will learn, *Mathetes*, to make them hereafter for yourſelf.

THERE is another cauſe to be aſſigned for mens aggravating the particular miſeries which come in the courſe of nature, and fall under the moſt perfect general laws of providence; which is "the having their own minds diſtorted by vice, "which almoſt neceſſarily makes their ſenti-"ments of the Deity miſhapen and depraved. Bad diſpoſitions corrupt the judgment, and incapacitate it for inveſtigating the nobleſt ſubjects. Thoſe therefore who immerſed in the ſenſual life, are no admirers of the beauty of morals, who indulging to the malignant exceſſes of paſſion are accuſtomed to reſentment, malice, cruelty, and oppreſſion; all ſuch are hereby rendered very unfit for the pure contemplation of the univerſal mind. This will lead us to the true reaſon of thoſe baſe repreſentations which have been given of the divinity. The truth is this, the divine character has been drawn by many from their own ruling paſſions. How far we are free from a charge of this ſort, impartial judges muſt decide; but that this was the cauſe of many groſs miſrepreſentations of the divine character in former

ages will be frankly acknowledged. The ſenſualiſt firſt repreſented the divine enjoyments as ſenſual, which gave riſe to impure fables, and a variety of ſordid rites long practiſed in heathen temples. The imperious temper, which is pleaſed with bowings, flattering, addreſs, and low cringing ſervility, firſt introduced thoſe falſe forms of reverence which ſuppoſe the Deity not truly great, but unamiable and imperious, ſo as to be in any generous ſenſe inacceſſible. The tyrannic and oppreſſive ſpirit firſt feigned the author of nature to be an arbitrary being, and his government a real tyranny. This opinion led the way to lacerations, howlings, and all thoſe cruel rites which could not be eſteemed recommendatory to the favour of God, unleſs he was thought to be arbitrary and malevolent. The opinion, on which ſuch horrid cuſtoms are grounded, was firſt entertain'd by the abuſers of power, the revengful and malicious: otherwiſe, whence could theſe diſhonourable notions ariſe? how came ſuch infamous practices into uſe? or what other reaſons can we aſſign for mens thus vitiouſly characterizing the ſupreme being? Beſides, ignorance of ſome particular phenomena, attended with miſery, we muſt

add

add, as the principal cauſe, the loſs of the true moral temper. Having loſt this, mankind proceeded to ſpeak of the Deity, as a wretched picture of themſelves, when actuated by their predominant paſſions. Whence certain idolatrous opinions and uſages took their riſe, has been the laborious enquiry of ages. Some have ſuppos'd 'em to derive their birth from the ſtars, while others have given them a leſs exalted original. The truth undoubtedly is, that many of theſe were forged at different times and ſtole into the world at different corners, and under various pretences. With reſpect to many particular ſentiments and cuſtoms, which are no other than ſilly and ridiculous, they might gradually ſpring from many accidents, ignorantly commented upon; but this vitiated aſpect of theiſm, with all its features of malignity, is moſt naturally derived from ſome one or other immoral and perverſe diſpoſition. The offspring does not diſhonour the parent, its very deformities are thus naturally accounted for, and its complexion, bad as it is, ſhewn to be hereditary. The difficulty is, I think, by this time nearly unravell'd; and for the entire ſolution of it, I would only mention one thing more, and that is " a love of novelty, to which ſeveral diſ-

" advan-

" advantagious accounts of the divine work-
" manſhip are to be attributed."

THIS Paſſion for the new and wonderful, has ſet men upon ſeeking for all ſort of rarities, eſpecially thoſe of the deformed kind, throughout the various provinces of nature; and finding theſe but ſeldom or ſcarcely ever in their own opinion ſufficiently ſurprizing, a ſet of the ugliеſt and moſt groteſque figures are invented, and afterwards poſitively affirm'd by them to be the lively ſemblances of ſuch creatures as they have ſeen in foreign parts.

MANY naturaliſts, to amaze their readers, dwell long upon monſtrous animals and irregular births; thro' fond credulity they enrich their volumes with miſhapen curioſities; while ſtructures of inimitable wiſdom are paſſed over in ſilence, and the productions of the chaſteſt art that are ſeen every day, and common in every place, almoſt intirely diſregarded. The roughneſs, irregularities, and uncommon aſpects of nature, are generally ſpoke of in the hyperbolical ſtile. Thus the cataracts of the Nile muſt ſtunn the inhabitants, and occaſion general deafneſs *.

* See Cicero's, Som. Scip. §. 5. Edit. Tool.

SINCE the world is so much pleased with unnatural stories, history-writers are very ready to favour us also with monsters of an immoral shape, lest they should be censured for giving a dry and unentertaining account. Often times the imagination throws in some striking incident, or works up an unkind circumstances into the most horrid cruelty; and one hasty action shall be represented as cool determined malevolence. It is also very observable, that those particular periods are generally fixed upon by them which afford the greatest variety, and most affecting train of strange relations, and miserable occurrences. Convulsions in governments give scope for the historian; and we must be perpetually alarmed with the noise of civil wars and public dissentions. These, broke off from their connection in the general scheme, without tracing their rise or consequence in any moral view, are exposed as the marks of a destructive providence. In larger works of the historical kind, if any periods are abridged, those are sure to be made the freest with, which shew civil life the most happy and flourishing, while national miseries are lengthened out beyond all reasonable size and just proportion. Thus peaceful reigns, long established liberty, and successive flows of publick prospe-

proſperity, are looked upon as the proper breaks and chaſms of hiſtory; which periods, filled up with juſtice to providence, are of all others the moſt ornamental, the moſt inſtructive, and the moſt intereſting. But no wonder divine benevolence is overlooked in publick hiſtory, when few are gratefully ſenſible of it even in the cloſer hiſtory of private life.

In travels the ſame humour prevails; tho' nature has ſpread the ſofteſt carpet, we muſt ſcarcely tread upon it, but walk over burning ſands, and lodge at night in ſome cavern, or under a rock's ſide. If the borders of foreign countries are indulgent and hoſpitable, by travelling up into them, amazing wonders ariſe; and by going farther on, you will ſee the moſt aſtoniſhing creatures imaginable. Thus Herodotus was told, "that beyond the cultivated "parts of Scythia there was a vaſt deſart, and "that beyond this deſart dwelt a race of men-"eaters; and certain mountains were ſaid to "be inhabited by men with goats feet; and "over theſe hills were another ſort of people "who ſlept for ſix months together: all which he mentions as fabulous relations. An ignorant and barbarous people, whoſe views of things are not enlarged by commerce or by in-

intercourſe with foreigners, will be always credulous, and may liſten to the moſt extravagant deſcriptions of other nations without ſuſpicion. We can ſooner detect the lying traveller, and know better how to hear or read him with proper allowances.

In our accounts of voyages, we are told of hardſhips and miſeries ſuſtained in a ſtile beyond meaſure unfortunate. No ſooner put out to ſea, but the veſſel is drove away by adverſe winds; ſoon after this, numbers are periſhing for want; the reſt perhaps fall into the hands of pirates, or become ſhipwracked; then, to follow our crew, we muſt climb the rocks impending over the boiſterous waves of the ſea, and wander over inhoſpitable iſlands. Thus voyage-adventures are generally written in the marvellous ſtrain; and in the intervals between rocks, ſhoals, tempeſts and ſhipwrecks, we are preſented with ſea-monſters; for it is much the ſame thing whether it is by ſea or land; we are no ſooner taken out of our knowledge, but the adventurer begins to ſurprize us with very odd appearances, like the ſoldiers of *Germanicus*, who after their embarkation at the river *Amiſia*, were diſperſed by a violent tempeſt, and caſt on different ſhores, ſome of

them landed on the Britiſh coaſt, and upon their return ſtrange ſtories were told not only of tempeſts and whirlwinds, and ſuch birds as were never before heard of, but alſo of monſters half form'd like men, and half like beaſts *.

In tragedies, lovers talk of nothing but flames, racks, and torments. Life is ſo miſerable, they are for an immediate ſurrender of it, tho' as yet in its unimpair'd and perfect vigour; beauty is weeping, and innocence in diſtreſs. Many repreſentations, the moſt unpleaſing to virtuous and noble minds, are introduced without any apology; as if miſery in this life was the common fate of the worthieſt characters. Every ſcene muſt open with ſome direful exclamation, and end with an expiring groan: and, as if the cauſe of virtue ſhould have too many admirers, it is perpetually brought on the ſtage friendleſs and expoſed; there to ſuffer and die in the view of the ſpectators. All this is done without intimating, that ſuch ſufferings are out of the ordinary

* *Ut quis ex longinquo revenerat, miracula narrabant, vim turbinum et inauditas volucres, monſtra maris, ambiguas hominum et beluarum formas.* *Tacitus* had too much ſenſe to credit thoſe reports; and adds, *viſa, ſive ex metu credita.*

Tacit. Ann. l. 11. c. xxiv.

courſe

courſe of providence; a circumſtance juſtly detracting from the reputation of many of our beſt tragedies.

NEED we aſk why public evils, ſuch as maſſacres, national perſecutions, and civil wars are expatiated upon at large by our hiſtorians. The reaſon is plain; they are great ſtrangers in our countries, and uncommon as earthquakes, hurricanes, or the waſting peſtilence. Monſtrous animals are view'd with particular obſervation; they aſtoniſh us becauſe the various forms of being we behold are well ſhaped and beautiful, and organiz'd with the moſt exquiſite wiſdom. In a creation every where teaming forth its diſproportion'd and ill form'd births, even the ſtructure of a common ſpire of graſs might have gain'd our admiration; and a flower, than which we know not any leſs elegantly adorned, have appeared in the cabinet of the curious and polite connoiſſeur of nature: but we behold innumerable formations of the moſt curious mechaniſm ſpecifically diſtinguiſhed into all the variety and blendings of colouring. Theſe flowery beauties are now with infinite profuſion ſpread over the earth to amuſe our more negligent ſeaſons, while great and higher objects continually invite us to aſpire after more enlarged knowledge of the

beautiful and good. Placed under the ample dome of heaven amidſt an immeaſurable ſcene of things, thus fair, thus harmonious, and benevolent, no decorations of art, no graceful movement, nor any expreſſions of felicity and joy can poſſibly ſurprize us. Miſhapen objects and deſtructive appearances are the ſtrange and uncommon; theſe are therefore carefully collected as the greateſt rarities in the hiſtory of nature and nations. Accuſtomed to walk in ſtill ſerenity with the ſtreams of nature's plenty flowing round in endleſs windings, and the productions of regular deſign crouding every proſpect; thus uſually circumſtanced, we view with wonder a tempeſtuous ſea, look down the precipice with a fearful kind of pleaſure, and gaze upon a huge ragged rock hanging in a declining poſture with aſtoniſhed aſpect and feeling ſurprize. Thus it is ſhewn why theſe ſeeming awful deformities amaze creatures living in a world where order, harmony, and goodneſs reign.

THUS, *Mathetes*, in order to introduce you to the ſerene and true philoſophy, I thought it firſt neceſſary to take a view of that which is not leſs terrifying than it is falſe. In doing this, I could not honeſtly avoid being explicit in

my

my declarations againſt the ungenerous, the unfair treatment which nature and providence have met with from too many of our moraliſts. Detaching particular parts as they have done from the general deſign without proper regard to their relative uſes, or thoſe maſter-laws under which they ought to be conſidered, is a blunder of all others the moſt inexcuſable. By this vitious licence the faireſt productions of art eaſily may be disfigur'd and brought into diſgrace. I then directed you to make a cautionary obſervation upon this precipitancy, by ſhewing how many have hereby involved themſelves in difficulties unſurmountable: for to prove the ſupreme adminiſtration to be good, we muſt vindicate preſent meaſures, and be obliged to own them conſiſtent with perfect goodneſs; ſince wherever the preſent ſcheme is wrong, it is confeſſed not to be ſo by chance, but by the divine conſent and permiſſion. This, as you will eaſily perceive, is a thought reaching far, and of very great weight and influence. Then I proceeded to lay before you the fair and candid rule, whereby we ought to determine in relation to any ſyſtem which cannot be cloſely examined throughout, nor admits a nice inſpection to be made into every part, and

" the

" the prevailing taſte and general character of " the workmanſhip, ſo far as open to our " view, muſt influence and fix our opinion " of the reſt." It is by this rule we are to judge of the univerſal ſtructure: therefore to ſay this is no other than a great ruin, is maintaining atheiſm: for it can only, as the work of contrivance and deſign, be proved the legitimate offſpring of a parent mind. To give the preference in power or leading influence to malevolent energies and evil laws, is demoniſm. To ſay the ſtrife betwixt theſe and contrary exertions is equal, eſtabliſhes *Manicheaniſm*; and to aſſert, that all we ſee of nature and providence are the parts of one perfect whole, governed by laws impowered with ſeparate proportions of influence, as the true intereſt of the whole requires, ſupports the doctrine of unity, and is not leſs than perfect theiſm. This led me naturally to obſerve how very inconſiſtent it is for one of a religious character, which I hope you will always eſteem as the higheſt ornament and dignity of a rational being, to ſpeak of this viſible ſyſtem either as deform'd, or as miſerable; neither faith, hope, virtue, or religion can ariſe out of the ruins of nature. Theſe all mourn in thoſe deſcriptions

many have given of providence, and make ſuch deſcriptions real; they expire: the very traces of their memory would be blotted out for ever. Theſe divine principles are the offſpring of order and happineſs; and as they receive their birth from theſe, it is by them alſo they are cheriſhed, and they can live no longer than form, harmony, and good prevails. I then went forwards to enquire from whence thoſe miſrepreſentations which have occaſioned ſo much injury and real pain to the moral ſcience took their riſe: here I found myſelf obliged to lead you a while on the gloomy borders of ſuperſtition. We might have entered into that dark empire of terrors, and traced through numerous Inſtances the deforming influence of ſuperſtition on natural and moral ſcience: but as neither beauty nor chearfulneſs dwells there, we only looked into this dreary region, to be convinced of this truth in general, and then retired. You are, *Mathetes*, at your own liberty to enter farther into it; but I was afraid you would have taken it unkindly in me to have conducted you through all the gloomy haunts of ſuperſtition, where true ſcience is tyrannized over, and ap-

pears under a moſt horrid and unnatural diſguiſe; where we muſt have loſt ſight of the genuine good philoſophy; or, what would have been ſtill more unwelcome to a mind become liberal through knowledge, have ſeen it as an enſlaved captive led in chains and inſulted. Then we turned towards our controverſial writers, to obſerve how an inflexible ſterneſs in maintaining a particular favourite hypotheſis has occaſioned rude and unamiable repreſentations of things about us, while bigotry and falſe zeal have ſtamped undeſerved merit upon them. Then the omiſſion would have been unpardonable, not to have taken notice how evidently a fondneſs for ſaying ſomething new and ſurprizing has been the frequent occaſion of forced and unnatural commentaries on the plain ſenſe of the divine works. By making proper reflections as we have paſt along, you will much more chearfully undertake a candid examination of nature with moral reference to the deity. I have pointed out the different cauſes which have ſo frequently induced ſeveral authors to throw ſo much horror into their ſyſtems of providence, as oftentimes to ſink their reader into the

depth

depth of deſpair. I have done my endeavour to ſteer your courſe ſafely paſt theſe dangerous rocks. I hope you will ſoon arrive at the happy coaſt, where liberty and truth ſtand ready to receive you, and to hand you forward to the region of wiſdom and true philoſophy, where the goodneſs of the Deity is acknowledged ſuperior to every principle in nature; conſequently where every proſpect will appear more ſerene, fair and auſpicious, tho' it is ſtill human life with you, and you remain an inhabitant of the ſame world. Poſſibly the length of this letter may make it tireſom to you; yet believe me, it is with a degree of reluctance I find myſelf drawing near the concluſion. The truth is, I diſlike to take my leave of a friend in any way whatever, and am diſpoſed to invent a thouſand trifling circumſtances to defer it: but this is not all, for when you call upon me to remove your diſquietude, I would chuſe to be rather guilty of ſaying too much than too little; and more eſpecially, when the honour and goodneſs of divine providence are concerned. Well, let nature take her courſe, ſhe means you well: and it is your duty to believe it. With the moſt expreſſive goodneſs ſhe ſmiles upon you. Go on therefore in the

paths

paths of virtue, and be happy; and when the vigour of the day is over, may your felicity lengthen out, like the evening ſhadows, with the decline of life, and your mind be moſt divinely ſerene and peaceful at the going down of the ſun.

I am ever yours, &c.

F I N I S.

REFLEXIONS

On the SOURCES of

INCREDULITY

With regard to

RELIGION.

The SECOND EDITION.

EDINBURGH:
Printed by SANDS, MURRAY, and COCHRAN,
FOR
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Loquendum ut multi, sapiendum ut pauci.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following treatiſe was left imperfect by the author, a late eminent lawyer; who was no leſs conſpicuous for his zeal in the cauſe of Religion, than for his ſincere love of juſtice, and an invariable attachment to the laws of his country, in the ſeveral high ſtations he filled with applauſe. That it is unfiniſhed, was occaſioned by his death, an event univerſally lamented: that it is now publiſhed, is owing to ſome of his friends; who are willing to believe, that even a fragment by ſo maſterly a hand may not be an unacceptable preſent to the publick.

REFLEXIONS

ON

INCREDULITY.

IT is raſh to affirm, that the univerſe, or even the ſolar ſyſtem, was made principally for the ſake of the earth, or of man; becauſe, for ought we know, there may be many more, and more conſiderable uſes for it. It is at the ſame time not certain, at leaſt to me it does not appear to be ſo, that there was any other uſe for creating theſe immenſe heavenly bodies, but to regulate the motion of the earth; to produce the other effects which ſome of them evidently have, and all of them in a greater or ſmaller proportion may have on the earth; and to raiſe in man that idea of the magnificence, power, and ſkill of the Creator, which the contemplation of the immenſity, motion, order, beauty, and utility of theſe bodies muſt produce.

IT is becauſe we know not whether thoſe bodies are inhabited, that we cannot pronounce, that the utility they bring us, is or is not the only end of creating them. If they are inhabited, the inhabitants muſt be of a texture very

different from thoſe of the earth. But we cannot deem it impoſſible, that beings may have been made, fit to reſide, to act, and to think, in the very centre, as well as on the ſurface of the ſun.

But, without determining that queſtion, which the ſcantineſs of our lights will not permit us to decide; it is obvious, that, beſides the phyſical influence which theſe bodies may have on the earth, and on us, it muſt have been one, and that no inconſiderable end of the making them, to help man to ſuch an idea as has been mentioned of the Creator.

It is raſh to ſay, that any one part of the furniture of this earth is uſeleſs; that there is not ſome utility in the various ſoils and metals; or that the different plants, inſects, reptiles, fiſh, fowls, quadrupeds, are not neceſſary for certain purpoſes, though we have not yet diſcovered them. Who will deny uſefulneſs to poiſonous plants; or dare affirm that moths, rats, toads, vipers, and other vermin, have not been intended for proper and fit uſes? It is bold to aſſert, that the leaſt animalcule diſcovered by the microſcope, has not its proper uſe in nature.

It ſeems unreaſonable to ſay, that God framed all the ornament of this earth, to ſatisfy himſelf that he could do it; ſince he perfectly knew, that he could do every thing that does not involve contradiction.

But,

BUT, as the whole frame of this earth, ſo far as we know it, and every plant and living creature that are ſupported by it, are, to man, ſtrict and very obvious demonſtrations of the power and wiſdom of the Creator; as the œconomy and diſpoſition of the whole is of his goodneſs; it ſeems reaſonable to conclude, that one, poſſibly the chief end of creating thoſe things, was, to ſhew God to man.

MOST of the productions of the earth, are one way or another for the uſe of animals. Many animals are the food of other animals; and, to be ſure, ſo intended by the Maker. Man, as an animal, has his ſhare of the leguminous, as well as of animal food. Every living creature wants nouriſhment, and finds it ready provided; but all have not eyes to ſee the bountiful hand that reaches it. Man has his proviſion in common with the other animals; but then he has eyes that may, and, if he do not ſhut them, muſt ſee the hand from which it comes. On the brute therefore, who cannot know his benefactor, there is no obligation to duty or gratitude; on man, who may and ought to know, there is and muſt be. Why then may it not be fairly concluded, that one of the chief ends of crowding the earth with ſo many wonders of the vegetable and animal kind, is, to fill the head of man with admiration, and his heart with gratitude?

IT is raſh to ſay, that the bee knows, or

makes uſe of any geometrical principles in the formation of its hexagonal cells; or that it is from any phyſical knowledge of the properties of flowers, that it is directed to cull the ſweets that yield its honey from ſome, neglecting others. It is raſh to affirm, that the various tribes of ſpiders conſider, and, from reflexion and by mechanical rules, frame thoſe nets of different forms and ſizes, that catch their vagrant prey. It is raſh to ſuppoſe, that the ſwallows, the crows, the magpies, frame their neſts, and make choice of that ſituation, from any antecedent reaſoning what is fitteſt to be done, or from any architectonical notions. It is neither reflexion nor hunger that moves the cat to lie in wait ſo patiently and ſo attentively for the mouſe or the rat. Theſe actions they exert, probably becauſe they are directed by their frame to exert them; and to that diſpoſition we give the name of *Inſtinct*.

It is falſe to ſay, that men deſire to eat and drink, from knowing that doing ſo is neceſſary to preſerve their lives; or that they have a deſire for the other ſex, from a deſign of propagating the ſpecies. Theſe diſpoſitions flow from their make: they hunger, they thirſt, they luſt, whether they would or would not. In theſe things, and ſome others, they are moved by their frame as brutes are.

But, laying aſide theſe natural, or rather mechanical diſpoſitions, man compared with brutes

brutes is much at a loſs, except in ſo far as Reaſon and reflexion come to his aſſiſtance. He has no inſtinct to determine him what to eat, what to avoid eating. It is but a ſmall part of the globe, if any, that can afford man fruits or legumes to ſupport him the whole year round. His make is not fit for catching animals to live on, were he naturally carnivorous. No Inſtinct ſuch as appears in other animals, directs him to this or that ſort of habitation; and were he not directed by experience and reflexion, he muſt quickly periſh.

MAN comes into the world much more helpleſs, and continues ſo much longer than any other animal we know. Without the care of his parents he muſt be ſoon loſt; and without the inſtruction which their experience enables them to afford his Reaſon, he muſt continue miſerable, until his own experience and obſervation yield matter for his Reaſon to work on. He therefore was evidently ſo framed, as to be obliged to follow Reaſon for his guide; whereas all the other animals had their guide in their texture and conſtitution.

No animal but man wants cloathing, other than nature has provided for it. Man can hardly live in any part of the globe, unleſs he find cloathing for himſelf.

No animal but man ſtands in need of cookery, or any other preparation for his food, but what

what it has from nature. Man muſt prepare every thing almoſt, except fruits and legumes, before they are fit for his ſervice. Grain muſt be ground and baked; all ſort of meat muſt be altered in its condition by fire; and I doubt ſalt muſt by induſtry be found or made, before the nouriſhment be proper for man.

No climate yields ſpontaneouſly food ſufficient for man, though all do for the brutes that inhabit them. Man does not cultivate the ground, nor find ſupplies for his wants, from inſtinct, but from obſervation and reaſoning.

REASON in him muſt anſwer the end of Inſtinct in brutes. He ſees trees and all vegetables ſpring from ſeeds; if he would have plenty, he muſt plant or ſow. He ſees grains and fruits fall and periſh, unleſs they are gathered and preſerved; and he ſees the ant induſtriouſly gathering and laying up ſtores. Theſe obſervations muſt lead him to produce and ſave corns, *&c.* Cold makes cloathing neceſſary; the ſpider's thread and web furniſh matter for his fancy, and ſpinning and weaving are invented. Floods, and ſtorms, and winter make ſhelter neceſſary. The ſwallow makes uſe of mortar, the crow of ſticks for its neſt: man's invention improves on their inſtinct; at firſt huts riſe, and at laſt palaces.

INSTINCT carries brutes no farther than to what is fit and neceſſary: Reaſon carries man ſo

ſo far; but then it, or at leaſt it prompted by vanity, carries him much farther. In place of warm cloathing, which nature requires, vanity will have it rich and gaudy. The bluſh of the roſe, the plume of the peacock, and the ſhining wing of the butterfly, muſt be imitated to deck our fine Ladies, and our much finer young Gentlemen. In place of convenient manſions, we muſt have ſumptuous palaces, cruſted with marble, and ſhining with gold. In place of food fitted for our ſtomachs by roaſting and boiling, we run into the moſt ridiculous gratification of extravagant taſte, by unnatural mixtures, that diſtreſs the ſtomach. And in place of uſing wine, and ſtrong drink, our own invention, for neceſſary purpoſes, if any ſuch there are, we make them the inſtruments of debauch, the means of debaſing our underſtanding, and deſtroying our health.

HAPPY brutes! unhappy man! Their inſtinct carries them to what is fit and convenient for them; but it carries them no farther; it leads them to nothing that undoes them. His Reaſon ſupplies in him the lack of inſtinct, and leads him to every thing that is neceſſary or convenient; nay, bounds him to that when duly made uſe of. His Reaſon, beſides ſupplying the place of inſtinct, was clearly intended for opening to him a ſcene of very delightful employment; the contemplation of the works of God, the reflexion on his boundleſs might, wiſdom, and goodneſs, and the enjoyment of his favour.

favour. But unluckily this laſt has long ceaſed to be any part of his buſineſs, His Reaſon is made uſe of indeed, by all means, whether right or wrong, to purchaſe things neceſſary and convenient; but he does not ſtop there. He ſeldom ever makes uſe of it to prevent the abuſe of theſe conveniences: on the contrary, he employs it in contriving means to raiſe and to gratify unnatural appetites, by which his conſtitution is hurt. And he ſeems to have no other view in the conduct of his life, but to ſatisfy thoſe vitious and deſtructive inclinations, which he himſelf has raiſed, and ſubſtituted in the room of thoſe which Reaſon was intended to lead him to.

BRUTES are by nature ſufficiently ſupplied with neceſſaries, and with Inſtinct to teach them to make uſe of them; and if they had eyes to ſee the Author of nature, they ſurely would be thankful. Man is richly ſupplied by nature; and, in place of Inſtinct, has Reaſon to teach him to apply to his uſe and convenience what nature has produced. He has beſides eyes to ſee the Author of nature, and of his bleſſings, the giver of that Reaſon that helps him to turn the product of the earth to his account; and he has in his make a diſpoſition to gratitude, as well as he knows, that acknowledgment, thankfulneſs, and compliance with the will of his Maker and Benefactor, is his duty. But, alas! how ſeldom does he ſuffer that diſpoſition to be brought by Reaſon to act?

act? How little is he employed in thinking on nature, with a view to discover and admire its Author? and how small is his concern for the will, for the honour of that Being by whose power and bounty he subsists?

BECAUSE he can raise plants, and gather fruits and seeds; because he can convert these seeds and fruits into bread and wine; because he can manufacture silk, wool, and flax; because he can smelt minerals, and produce a sort of new species of metals; and because he can, by making use of his Reason, procure a vast variety of gratifications to his taste, and to his vanity, he forgets the Being whose gift that reason was: he is apt to look upon himself as the creator of all those things that afford him subsistence or gratification, and on them as his creatures: he thinks it lawful to make use of his own to any excess: and he at last drops into an opinion, that true felicity consists in the gratification of all appetites, at any expence, without regard to right or wrong; and that every thing that may safely be done to compass that gratification, is lawful.

WHEN this comes to be the settled disposition of the mind; when the bias of the heart is the gratification of all lusts and appetites; when the gratification of these lusts and appetites is directly adversary to what right Reason says is the will of God, and inconsistent with what it says would have been our chief felicity,

even in this life, had we purſued it; no one can wonder, that right Reaſon is not conſulted, or its voice liſtened unto; or that the crowd, eſpecially of the giddy and vitious, ſhun all correſpondence with Reaſon, all ſort of meditation; and in place thereof, when they are ſatiated with the gratification of groſſer appetites for the time, and cannot proceed farther in the enjoyment, they take up with play, or other the moſt ſilly, if not offenſive amuſements, rather than be left alone in the hands of their own conſcience and reflexions.

THUS has Reaſon, the higheſt gift that God has been pleaſed to beſtow on men, by the perverſity of fooliſh guilty man become the inſtrument of his miſery. Reaſon was given him, in place of inſtinct, to direct his choice; which was left free, that he might deſerve, and be rewarded for doing well: Reaſon was given, to guard him againſt the prevalence of luſts and appetites, and to lead him to the chief felicity his nature was capable of: Reaſon was given, to let him ſee the order, the beauty, and the magnificence of the works of God; and thereby to diſcover the excellency, the power, the wiſdom, and the goodneſs of that ſelf-exiſtent Being: Reaſon was given, to ſhew him his immediate dependence on his Creator, for every bleſſing he enjoyed, as well as the capacity of enjoying them; and to fill his ſoul with gratitude for the overflowing bounty of his Maker: And Reaſon was given him, to complete and

ſecure

ſecure his felicity, by a ſettled confidence in the favour and protection of the Almighty, ſo long as he made uſe of it to controul and correct diſorderly appetites; and to anſwer the end of his creation, in admiring, reverencing, and adoring that ſource of perfection, mercy, and goodneſs. But, alas! to what miſerable purpoſes has wretched man employed this mighty boon of heaven! Reaſon, in place of reſtraining, has been made uſe of to encourage luſts and appetites, by inventing incentives to them: In place of leading men to ſee their duty, and the true object of their felicity, it has been employed in contriving means to divert the attention from looking at either: Nay, in place of diſcovering the boundleſs perfections of God, the abſolute dependence of man, and the neceſſary connexion between right and wrong and rewards and puniſhments, it has been fatally made uſe of to hide the Deity from the ſight of men, to erect man into an independent being, to aboliſh all hopes and fears of rewards or puniſhments, and to make felicity conſiſt in what is truly the diſhonour of the human nature.

AMAZING as this phænomenon is, nothing is more certainly true; nor has any effect in nature a more ſhameful, a more pitiful cauſe.

APPETITES were given to man, to prompt him to preſerve himſelf, and to continue the ſpecies. The natural calls to eat, to drink, to propagate the ſpecies, were neceſſary; elſe man

employed in contemplation, would ſoon have ceaſed to be. The acts of eating, drinking, copulating, without the natural ſtimulus, have nothing inviting in them. And it is an inſtance of the benignity of the Creator, that the gratification of thoſe neceſſary appetites is attended with a very ſenſible pleaſure, which rewards the obeying of nature's call; as it is an inſtance of his wiſdom, that when the ends of theſe natural calls are anſwered, ſatiety enſues, and the objects coveted loſe their charm, and cannot be ſo much as thought of with any reliſh, until nature has farther occaſion for them.

THE deſire of knowledge, the effect of diſcerning and reaſoning, was implanted to prompt man to employ thoſe faculties by which the Deity, and what is owing to him, might be diſcovered. And here again the goodneſs of the Divine Being is manifeſt, in annexing to the gratification of that deſire the calmeſt and moſt laſting ſatisfaction, without that alloy which attends the gratification of their other, carnal, appetites; and with this ſingularity, that the deſire of knowledge is inſatiable, and, like its object, infinite; rewarding nevertheleſs the ſeeker after knowledge with very ſenſible pleaſure in every ſtep of his purſuit.

THE deſire of preſerving life, (not to ſpeak of the natural impulſe to avoid ill), is the reſult of the pleaſures and enjoyments of both kinds provided for man in this life.

AND

And the deſire of approbation, is the incentive planted in man by his Maker, to diſpoſe him to do his duty; which is immediately rewarded by the calm ſatisfaction that warms his heart upon having done it. The approbation of the Author and Maker of all things, muſt be of infinite conſequence to the creature; and the conſciouſneſs of having gained that approbation, muſt yield the pureſt joy.

The other diſpoſitions, or what are called paſſions of the mind, ſuch as, anger, fear, love, hatred, *&c.* have been placed in man for noble, and for ſalutary ends; not only as they reſpect man's duty to the Deity, but as they regard ſociety: though thoſe alſo, as man has unhappily contrived the matter, in place of promoting the ends for which they were meant, hurry man on to miſery, and give birth to many diſorders in ſociety.

Now, thus qualified for happineſs, what has man done to enjoy, or to preſerve it? Why, truly, finding an immediate pleaſure attendant upon the gratification of ſenſual appetites, he is diſpoſed to place his happineſs in them: Finding that pains and induſtry muſt be uſed to ſupply what his appetites crave, he beſtows all his time and action in that purſuit: Finding that, employing his Reaſon, he can refine upon the common gratification of thoſe appetites, by inventing new meats, new drinks, new ſauces; by procuring variety of women;

by

by erecting palaces; by picture; by ſculpture; by muſick; and by numberleſs arts, to pleaſe and to amuſe, his Reaſon is made uſe of to thoſe purpoſes only: And finding that, by the uſe of Reaſon, he can not only arrive at thoſe things, but that, though he is far from being the ſtrongeſt of animals, he, by employing it, is more powerful than they are all put together; that he is their lord and maſter, and they ſubſervient to his uſes; that he can blow up rocks, alter the courſe of rivers, lock up the ſea in baſons, join, in a manner, diſtant continents by ſhips; that he can imitate thunder, and lay whole countries waſte; and that thoſe things he can do without any immediate controul or check from the Author of nature; he is apt to think he owes all theſe advantages and prerogatives to himſelf, and to that Reaſon which diſtinguiſhes him from the reſt of the viſible creation; and, on that ſuppoſal, to conclude, that no Return of duty or gratitude is due to that ſuperior Being, from whom his Reaſon and all his real enjoyments flow.

As the firm belief of this concluſion is abſolutely neceſſary towards quieting his mind, in the career of brutal folly in which he is engaged, Reaſon, that unfortunate tool, is made uſe of on every occaſion to blind its owner. It was given by the Creator to be his guide; and it ought to be ſo: if duly made uſe of and attended to, it would be ſo. But, as man has contrived to manage matters, it is liſtened

to

to only when it ſuggeſts what is fit to ſooth him in his fooliſh ſhameful courſes. On ſuch occaſions it is the ſole and ſovereign rule. But if it preſumes to check him; if it inſinuates, that he is no more than a poor dependent creature, debtor to the ſupreme Being, and conſequently accountable for every talent, every bleſſing, every enjoyment; that ſuggeſtion is ſtraightway treated as the offspring, not of manly Reaſon, but of mean daſtardly fear; a melancholy conceit, nurſed up in ſickly imaginations; which had its origin in certain inventions of cunning lawgivers, who, to keep their people in order, and in obedience to the laws eſtabliſhed by them, publiſhed notions of right and wrong, and of rewards and puniſhments, which, conveyed down by tradition, have gained credit with the weak, to the great diſturbance of their quiet, and paſs for realities with enthuſiaſts. Unhappy man! Fatal effect of prejudice: Reaſon, the ſovereign rule, is to be followed, and allowed that name, or rejected, and called the fruit of melancholy or enthuſiaſm, as it does or does not conform itſelf to prejudices.

But what is the moſt amazing on this article is, that in proportion as men are, or imagine they are poſſeſſed of knowledge, and of the art of reaſoning, in an eminent degree, their abuſe of that knowledge, and of the reaſoning faculty, to the prejudice of the end to which it was chiefly meant, is the more conſpicuous.

ſpicuous. In ancient times, which are now called times of ignorance, when men did not pique themſelves on the deep knowledge, and the profound ſkill in reaſoning, which we boaſt of at this time, there was a general diſpoſition to reverence the Creator, and a profeſſed infidel was hardly to be met with. But, in theſe our days of ſuppoſed knowledge, the guiſe is ſadly changed. Except amongſt thoſe called ignorant, not many are to be found that do, or pretend to believe in God.

FROM the beginning, a rational being, unaided by learning, and the experience of former ages, could eaſily diſcern the hand of an intelligent, wiſe, powerful, and very bountiful Creator, in the whole and in every part of the fabrick of this ſyſtem that fell under his ken; and could as eaſily diſcover his own obligations to, and his dependence on that Being. And accordingly we ſee, by the earlieſt accounts of time that have come to our hands, all mankind, full of a perſuaſion of their dependence, full of reverence to the Deity, ſoliciting his favour and protection by prayer, by ceremonies, by ſacrifices, ſometimes human, nay of their firſt-born; and imputing all their favourable or croſs incidents that happened to them, to the good-will or diſpleaſure of the ſovereign Being, whom it was their chief ſtudy to placate.

IT is true, that the notions they generally entertained of the Deity were imperfect, as well

well as their manner of ſerving him corrupted; circumſtances that can eaſily be accounted for from the weakneſs and perverſeneſs of thoſe who took the lead in directing their religious opinions and practices. But ſtill it is undeniably true, that the groſs of mankind were ſerious in their belief of the exiſtence of a Deity, of their dependence on him, and of the occaſion they had for his protection and favour.

To this general diſpoſition of mankind it was in part owing, that the goſpel, upon its firſt publication, made ſo rapid and ſo ſurpriſing progreſs. No man at that time doubted of the exiſtence of a Deity, or of man's dependence on him. It was eaſy to ſatisfy every one who admitted theſe propoſitions, that mankind, by the corruption into which they had fallen, ſtood mightily in need of ſome interceſſor, ſome mean by which they might be ſaved from the weight of their ſins. And it is no marvel, that evidence given to men ſo convinced, that ſalvation might be had through JESUS, ſhould be received with gladneſs.

AND accordingly we ſee, that, in a trifle of time, the herd of mankind, in defiance of all diſcouragements, and of the moſt ſevere perſecutions, from power, greedily embraced and profeſſed this faith; and continued ſtedfaſtly in the profeſſion of it, notwithſtanding the monſtrous abſurdities with which the teachers of that faith loaded it, and the more monſtrous and

ſhocking lives and manners of the teachers; until of late years, that what ought to have been improved into a bleſſing to mankind, has unfortunately turned out to their deſtruction.

In the period juſt mentioned, wicked and voluptuous men purſued wicked and voluptuous courſes; and many groſs villanies and abuſes were daily committed by profligate men, which the degenerate condition of mankind produced. But ſtill theſe wickedneſſes were diſguiſed, diſowned, or ſome how ſought to be atoned for. The villain diſſembled at leaſt, and was forced to be ſo mean as to become a hypocrite. No man dreamed of profeſſing openly, that he denied the being of a God, or his dependence on, and being accountable to him. And if any one was indeed ſo fooliſh, as well as impious, as to entertain ſuch a notion, (which by the by is with me a queſtion), there was no temptation for uttering it; becauſe there was no chance that any one ſhould concur in ſupporting ſuch an opinion.

But of late the caſe is ſurpriſingly, and ſadly altered, by the very mean that ought to have produced the contrary effect; increaſe in knowledge, from the more careful obſervation of nature, and from the peruſal of the works of the learned in all ages.

Whatever degree of acquiſition of knowledge from experience, the longevity of the antediluvians

tediluvians might have rendered practicable for any particular perſon, it is certain, that the ſhort period to which mens lives are now, and have for ſome thouſands of years been limited, does not permit any individual to lay in any conſiderable ſtock of knowledge. And if he will know much, he muſt profit of others, his contemporaries; or of thoſe that went before him, by tradition, or by writing.

HENCE all arts have been perfected by degrees. The experience of one age adds to that of another. And if the diſcoveries of our forefathers had not been handed down to us by writing or tradition, we ſhould be as rude and unlearned as the moſt barbarous of them were.

AFTER writing became faſhionable among the ancients, the experience, the reaſoning, and diſcoveries of one age, were tranſmitted to, and improved on by the next. The inquiſitive became diligent in peruſing the diſcoveries of former times: philoſophy became mightily in vogue; and it was no uncommon thing for men of parts, to dedicate their whole time to the contemplation of nature, and to place their whole felicity in employing all their mental faculties in the inveſtigation of truth.

As purſuits of this kind are of all others the moſt noble, and the moſt ſuited to a rational being, they ſoon became the moſt honourable.

nourable. Philoſophers were held to be *wiſe men*, and were called ſo *tout court*; as undoubtedly they held themſelves to be, though modeſtly they contented themſelves with the appellation of *lovers of wiſdom* only; and the vanity they had in being very much more knowing than other people, and in being thought by others *wiſe*, was the chief reward they had for their labour, and contributed not a little to run them into the vain opinion, that they were in very deed *wiſe*, and that their ſkill and wiſdom could anſwer all purpoſes.

In all arts and ſciences, ſo far as the obſervations they were poſſeſſed of afforded materials, they reaſoned accurately. In morality, and the whole ſyſtem of duties which men owe reciprocally to each other, and which members owe to the ſociety whereof they are part, they acquitted themſelves well. Brutal appetites and enjoyments they ſaw, and reproached the meanneſs of; the ſuperior happineſs which the right exerciſe of the underſtanding yields, they felt and recommended. Reaſon, in contradiſtinction to appetites and paſſions, was their ſovereign guide; and felicity was to be attained by following its dictates. Social and publick virtues had, according to their notions, charms ſufficient to make the poſſeſſor of them happy, and to ſecure againſt all wants, pains, and diſtreſſes.

But though their ſagacity and attention diſcovered

discovered and described the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice; though they defined with precision the limits of social and political duty; and though it was the labour of their lives, to recommend what was good, and to dissuade from what was evil: yet it unluckily so happened, that the learning and reason which they valued themselves upon, never once led them to the reflexions for which they were principally intended, on the excellencies and manifest attributes of the Author of the creation, on the necessary dependence of man upon his favour, and on the duty thence resulting to the Deity. Such reflexions would have been fit to humble their vanity, and to have checked them in the course of pursuits, which though not openly vitious, yet had nothing of that reverence and attention that is due to the Deity mixed with them.

So soon as these wise philosophers had got that quantity of knowledge which in their apprehensions placed them above other men, and had got into a high opinion of their own Reason; they no longer employed their parts in attending to and investigating the wondrous effects of wisdom, power, and goodness, displayed in the fabrick of this universe, in order to raise high and honourable ideas of the Almighty, and becoming notions of man's meanness, short-sightedness, and dependence: but, rejecting such poor-spirited reflexions, they took it in their heads to imagine, that the profusion of wonders

wonders in the works of creation was intended only for an exercise to their understanding, to discover how, by what mechanism, and for what ends such things were brought about. They found out they had not power sufficient to produce them; but on the all-sufficiency of their Reason they depended: and therefore to work they went, to discover, and to explain nature. Hence so many *cosmogonia's*, so many systems for shewing how the various *phænomena* are performed. Some set out on *hypotheses* which time has discovered to be absolutely false. Some gave only words, which had no certain meaning, and therefore explained nothing; but which the philosopher and his followers were perfectly satisfied with. And all of them agreed in this, that their Reason was a match for the undertaking; that is, fit to investigate and describe all the mysteries of nature, and to discover and determine all the ways and works of God.

WITH this prepossession in behalf of the powers of their Reason, these wise Gentlemen undertook to inquire into the nature of God; laying it down as a fixed point, to admit no quality in that Being that their Reason did not assign him; nor to allow any action to him, but what they, making use of their Reason and observation, could assign the cause and end of.

ON these articles the difference of opinion was great. Some held the world to be eternal; and

and the infinite variety and contrivance, to be the effect of *Nature*, eternal also: and with this sound, in place of sense, they were satisfied. Some held the world to be the work of an intelligent Being: but the number of them was few; and what regard he had to men in the composition, they did not say. Some held that the Deity directed events in this world, particularly those that regarded nations and societies: others utterly denied Providence; and imagined, that every thing was left to the government of Chance. Few philosophers allowed of a future state of rewards and punishments: those that did, thought only of rewarding publick virtues, and punishing vices noxious to society. None of them imagined, that God ever minded the inward disposition, or heart of man.

As *Epicurus* and his followers observed, that no signal punishment attended vice in this world, they denied Providence; as they could not be satisfied that the dead could rise, they denied a future state; and as there was no punishment that actually attended vitious actions in this world or another, all actions with them were indifferent. So that this sect, which was numerous, discarded the Deity, and made brutes of men.

But it is impossible they could have dropt into such monstrous absurdities, if the vain voluptuous course in which they were engaged, had

had not given a bias to their Reaſon; and if they had not made Reaſon ſo much the teſt and touchſtone of all things, as to reject every thing which it could frame any objection to, if it could not alſo, by its own light, diſſolve that objection.

HAD they duly attended to the popular opinions which prevailed in their days, that the gods regarded the actions of men; that good actions were pleaſing, and evil diſpleaſing to the Deity; that ſins, unleſs expiated, were to be puniſhed; and that rewards and puniſhments were to be met with in another ſtate: had they with care conſidered the eſſential difference between good and evil actions; the monſtrous abſurdity which attends the ſuppoſal, that wickedneſs can go unpuniſhed, or virtue unrewarded; and the neceſſary conſequence from thence, that there muſt be another time for thoſe rewards and puniſhments, as they do not happen in this life: and had they permitted themſelves to ſee, without prejudice, the numberleſs obligations, unacknowledged and unreturned, under which man lies to his Creator and Preſerver, and the infinite diſproportion there is between our weak ſcanty Reaſon and his boundleſs wiſdom, it is impoſſible they could have fallen into a ſet of ſuch childiſh opinions as they maintained.

BUT they were too much bewitched with the chimerical notions they had of their own excellency;

excellency; too fond of the character they had carved out for themſelves, after driving the Deity from their thoughts, of being lords of the creation, the chief of beings, accountable to none, happy in themſelves, intitled to gratify every appetite, and ſubject to no law but that of their own good-will and pleaſure, to ſubmit to the mortification that muſt reſult from the diſcovery of their real ſtate. The miſery into which folly had plunged human nature, muſt be a diſagreeable object of contemplation to a vain man who had got himſelf into poſſeſſion of the ſeat of God. The neceſſity of humiliation, repentance, amendment, interceſſion, and of a total alteration of views and purſuits, was a pill of no eaſy digeſtion. And therefore it is no great wonder, that though, on the firſt publication of the goſpel, the good tidings were greedily received by the unlearned, and conſequently leſs prejudiced, the philoſophers, and their ſcholars, the pretended learned men of the world, reſiſted it with the greateſt warmth and bitterneſs.

It was however lucky, that though the infidelity of the ancient philoſophers was almoſt as ſtrong as that of the modern, it was by much leſs extenſive; and therefore leſs miſchievous. Learning in thoſe days was confined to a few heads; books were ſcarce, and the purchaſe of them coſt a great deal of money: every body did not meddle with philoſophiſing, as they do at preſent; and, of conſe-

quence, knowledge of the philoſophical kind was only to be met with amongſt philoſophers who taught, and ſuch of their hearers as had leiſure, genius, and books, to enable them to proſecute their ſtudies. The herd of the people remained ignorant and undebauched; and the Chriſtian doctrine, which took root amongſt them, when it called in unprejudiced reaſon, and learning, to aſſiſt it, proved at laſt too ſtrong for the few fantaſtick proud philoſophers.

THUS was infidelity, that is, in theory and opinion, baniſhed from the Chriſtian world, till of late, that a falſe opinion has prevailed, that, with the reſtoration of learning, the knowledge of mankind has enlarged itſelf infinitely; that this is the effect of genius and Reaſon; and that making a proper uſe of this Reaſon, every thing that is, or appears to be myſterious in nature, may to a certainty, at leaſt to a very high degree of probability, be diſcovered. And this falſe opinion has unfortunately become ſo prevalent and extenſive, that, except amongſt the meaner and the leſs conceited part of mankind, it is not eaſy to meet with any one that is not tainted with it.

THIS miſchief is however by no means to be charged upon learning, but on the weakneſs and prejudices of mankind; who, conceiving too high an opinion of the powers of their own underſtanding, preſume to meaſure every

every thing, divine as well as human, by it. For when firſt the ſubverſion of the *Greek* empire drove learned men, with their books, into the weſt, which fell in with the time of the invention of printing, whereby knowledge was circulated, and could be come at much cheaper, and with leſs labour, than formerly, great numbers of men of genius applied themſelves to ſtudy, and in a trifle of time acquired ſo much knowledge as diſpoſed them to throw off the yoke, as well as the abſurditles of the church of *Rome;* which would have had a thorough effect, but for the paſſions and intereſts of ſelfiſh princes. But in this attack on the reigning church, infidelity had no ſort of hand. Learning had warmed the piety, as well as it improved the knowledge of the Reformers: a thorough examination of the ſcriptures, of hiſtory, and of antiquity, independent of the tradition of the church, ſecured and defined their faith: and piety in thoſe days was the companion of knowledge and learning; as it muſt ever continue to be where knowledge and learning are lodged in ſober minds.

THE quick and eaſy conveyance of knowledge by the preſs, ſoon produced in all ſoils ſwarms of men of real or pretended learning. Curioſity, genius, or the faſhion, (for it was the mode then to ſtudy), filled *Europe* with men of letters. Sciences of all ſorts were purſued by people of all countries, as their

taſtes ſeverally led them; all the ancient learning was expoſed to view; in theology, the progreſs juſt deſcribed was made; the *Roman* law was ſtudied, and taught with great accuracy; the *Greek* and *Roman* oratory and poetry became the ſtandards of performances of that kind; the *Greek*, particularly *Ariſtotle*'s philoſophy, reigned in the ſchools; *Hippocrates*, *Galen*, *Celſus*, *&c.* gave lights to phyſicians which they had not before; and the works of the ancient aſtronomers and mathematicians which remain, revived thoſe ſtudies; in which, by the aſſiduous application of ingenious men, very great progreſs has been made.

It muſt be owned, that, in almoſt every branch of learning, knowledge has been carried to a higher pitch, ſince the revival of learning, than it appears to have been by the ancients, from the remains of their works that have come to our hands. But that is not to be aſcribed to the ſuperiority of genius of the moderns; ſince the true cauſe of it can eaſily be aſſigned, *i. e.* That multitudes are at work on the ſame ſubject; and that the preſs affords ſo quick a conveyance of their conceptions and obſervations to each other, that they are thereby vaſtly aided in their lucubrations. Beſides that many accidental diſcoveries by men not always of the brighteſt parts, have given hints, and ſtruck out lights to the ingenious, which have led to conſiderable

able improvements, and have baniſhed many falſe ſyſtems.

ACCIDENT gave birth to the invention of teleſcopes, and of microſcopes; and yet to the firſt is owing the confirmation of the *Copernican*, and the ruin of the *Ptolomean* ſyſtem; and to the ſecond, the confirmation of Dr. *Hervey*'s diſcovery of the circulation of the blood, as well as the production to view of numberleſs tribes of animals, hitherto hid from mortal ſight. Accident gave birth to the invention of gun-powder, and of the air-pump; and experiments made on theſe have diſcloſed many unknown properties of the air. Experiments to which men have been led by accidents, have made ſurpriſing diſcoveries in chymy, and many parts of natural philoſophy, to the great improvement of phyſick, and other branches of uſeful knowledge. And the accidental diſcovery of the *Weſt-Indies*, and the intercourſe by trade with it, and with the *Eaſt-Indies*, have brought numbers of particulars to light, to which the ancients were utter ſtrangers.

POSSESSED of the learning of the ancients, with the vaſt addition of later diſcoveries, it is not to be wondered at, if the moderns exceeded the ancients as much in vanity, and the good opinion they entertained of their own capacity, as they did in knowledge. Hence they employed, with great induſtry, their time and their talents in ſearches after the ſecrets of nature,

nature, and in diſcovering and aſſigning the phyſical cauſes of the effects that ſhine forth in the univerſe. *Deſcartes*'s new *Coſmogonia* beat *Ariſtotle*'s, and all the other ancient ſyſtems, out of the ſchools. The artifice employed by the Creator, in the formation of the univerſe, in the direction, and the preſervation of it, was deſcribed, and laid open to the comprehenſion of the meaneſt capacity; the phyſical cauſes of the ebbing and flowing of the ſea, of magnetiſm, of the formation of metals, and of all the other ſeeming myſteries of nature, were aſſigned; and, to the conviction of the inventers, and of almoſt all *Europe*, for about half a century, nothing was wanted but the application of his principles, to account for every *phænomenon*, how ſurpriſing ſoever, that ſhould at any time make its appearance.

WHILST the world was drunk with this conceit, no marvel they ſhould entertain a very high opinion of the ſagacity of man. If his power was not to be compared with that of the Omnipotent, yet his wiſdom and knowledge did not ſeem to fall far ſhort of that of the Omniſcient. A well-inſtructed and well-convinced *Carteſian* would not think himſelf hard put to it by the queſtions about the formation of natural things which the Almighty put to *Job*, to humble his pride, and to convince him, that he was not a competent judge of the ways and views of God. And thence it naturally followed, that they looked down, with ſome contempt,

tempt, upon such parts of the scripture as appeared to them unphilosophical, entertained a poor opinion of the writers of them, and laughed at the simplicity of serious Christians, who believed several articles, in matters of religion, which those wise men could not account for so well, as they could for the formation of the universe, and the various *phænomena* of nature.

To this way of thinking their master's first principle led them. *Quicquid clarè & distinctè percipio, est verum,* was the foundation on which he built; and a good one. He surely run no risk in admitting whatever was founded on it. In all the parts of mathematicks, in which he excelled, the converting the proposition, and admitting nothing to be true but what one clearly perceives to be so, is the rule which has guided such as followed it to that degree of certainty which has distinguished those sciences from all others. The object of them admits of the application of the rule. Lines, angles, numbers, the creatures of man's imagination, defined by him, and receiving their nature from that definition, he may clearly conceive all the properties of; and is in the right to deny to any line, angle, or number, what he does not clearly perceive to belong to it. But if he carries this rule to other sciences, where the discovery of truth depends upon a different species of evidence: if he applies it to the works or ways of the Most High, which his knowledge does not reach to, as it does to the

the properties of lines and numbers, beings of his own creation; and of which he cannot poſſibly know any thing but what he gathers from conjecture, founded on the appearances in nature, or from what the Deity may have been pleaſed to reveal; monſtrous miſtakes may, and muſt grow. A thouſand improbable, nay almoſt inconceivable things, in natural philoſophy, are true. The teſtimony of the ſenſes confutes all objections from improbability, or inconceivability, if one may uſe the expreſſion; and credible evidence ſhort of that of ſeeing or feeling, from unſuſpected witneſſes, creates that certainty on which men may ſafely depend and act. And if it has pleaſed the Almighty to diſcover to mankind any thing relating to himſelf or to his ways, it is but of little conſequence, whether that falls in with the philoſophers notions or conceptions; and the only ſenſible queſtion can be, Whether there is ſufficient evidence that in fact ſuch things were revealed?

NOTWITHSTANDING theſe obvious reflexions, Monſ. *Deſcartes* and his followers, and the other ſects of philoſophers who have ſucceeded him, not content with world-making, have proceeded to god-making. They have preſumed to define him, his attributes and powers; nay, they have determined what he is and muſt be, and what he is not and cannot be, with ſuch preciſion and certainty, that if any thing ſaid to be revealed by himſelf, does

not

not conform directly to the character and qualities they have given this god, they straightway conteſt, and, right or wrong, reject the evidence for ſuch revelation.

DESCARTES's romance kept entire poſſeſſion of mens belief for full fifty years. If ſome croſs experiment ſhocked it in ſome particular, the ſyſtem was pieced up and mended by his followers, and accommodated to the new-diſcovered *phænomena*; till at laſt the tide of contrary obſervations and experiments was too ſtrong to be reſiſted. All the invention of his countrymen the *French*, could not prop the theory that experiment demonſtrated to be falſe: and what was worſt of all for *France*, it was cruſhed under the weight of another theory, built on the diſcoveries of Sir *Iſaac Newton*, an *Engliſhman*.

THE ſagacity of Sir *Iſaac* was admired by all, and adored by his countrymen. His genius puſhed him to diſcoveries in the moſt abſtruſe parts of the mathematicks, that have cauſed the aſtoniſhment of the learned; and at the ſame time, from accurate obſervations made on nature, he has given hints, which, though by him flung out in the form of queries only, his countrymen have converted into ſo many certain propoſitions; and upon them have founded what they pretend to be a compleat theory or ſyſtem, which future experiments and diſcovery muſt try the ſolidity of. But it muſt be

owned Sir *Iſaac*'s modeſty was much greater than that of his followers, not only in the title he gave to his notions, but in the reſpect with which, notwithſtanding his vaſt genius and ſuperior knowledge, he treated the Deity and the ſcriptures.

It is truly amazing, that the ſeries of blunders which the moſt exalted geniuſes who applied themſelves to ſyſtem-making have by late diſcoveries been found to have dropt into one after another, has not cured the philoſophers of our time of the high conceit they have entertained of the compaſs and all-ſufficiency of the human underſtanding, and of the madneſs of the undertaking, to trace, with the organs which we have got, the hidden wonders of the material creation; eſpecially ſince the more light we gain into natural things by accidental diſcoveries, the thicker the difficulties pour themſelves on us, and the more inexplicable theſe myſteries appear to be.

About the beginning of the laſt century, natural philoſophers had nothing to exerciſe their talents on, but ſuch *phænomena* as fell within their ſenſes, unaided by inſtruments, and ſuch obſervations as were without very great care or accuracy made accidentally on ſuch things as gave ſurpriſe on account of their ſingularity. But ſince that time, the microſcope has unveiled a ſort of new creation, at leaſt a very remarkable part of it, till then unknown; the

the teleſcope has diſcovered new worlds in the ſkies; and improvements in mathematicks and aſtronomy, have ſhewed the ſize and diſtance of thoſe worlds. The inconceivable minuteneſs of the microſcopick animals, of the parts whereof they are compoſed, of their juices and nutriment, and the delicacy of the artifice that has produced and ſupports them, ſtrikes the mind with as ſtrong a ſenſe of the plenitude of ſkill and power of the Creator, as the grandeur and magnificence of the new diſcoveries in the ſkies does of his immenſity; and both are equally fit to give to man the moſt humbling view of his own knowledge and penetration, as well as of his power, when compared with thoſe of the Almighty.

THE air-pump, experiments made therein, and others to which theſe gave riſe, have diſcovered many properties of the air, heretofore unknown, which ſhew the admirable ſagacity of that Being by whoſe aſtoniſhing contrivance that fluid is ſo adjuſted and tempered, as in effect to ſupport the animal as well as the vegetable world, and to maintain this part of the creation in the condition in which it is.

CHYMY purſued with attention, has diſcovered many effects of fire, and of mixtures, and general properties in metals, minerals, and other bodies, that give daily ſurpriſe; Anatomy has to a certain pitch laid open the aſtoniſhing artifice of the Creator, in the texture of the

body of man, as well as of other animals; a prism in Sir *Isaac Newton*'s hand has discloſed many qualities in light, which never had entered into the heart of man to think of; and ſome accidental experiments in Electricity have preſented to the ſenſes, appearances which ſhew, that there are ſome powers and properties in matter not hitherto dream'd of, and which no theory as yet hatched can account for.

THE natural effect of thoſe diſcoveries upon minds rightly diſpoſed, ought to be, to mortify ſelf-conceit, and to exalt our idea of the infinite power and perfection of the Creator; ſince the greater progreſs we make in diſcovering, the more wonders of contrivance, wiſdom, power, and goodneſs we meet with, which though our Reaſon can ſometimes ſee the end of, it is too ſcanty to trace the mechanical cauſe of; and for that muſt reſort to the will and pleaſure of the Deity, unleſs we will be ſo abſurd as to ſay, that nature, without any meaning or contrivance, has beſtowed thoſe properties and powers upon certain parcels of matter.

THAT denſe bodies gravitate in proportion to their maſs, and that projected bodies continue in motion until obſtructed, are appearances ſo common, that no one is ſurpriſed with the obſervation; and the crowd do not trouble their head in inquiring after the cauſes. But it is not ſo with the clear-ſighted philoſophers. They

They muſt puzzle their brains with aſſigning the mechanical cauſes for thoſe effects; and when they have done their beſt, they muſt confeſs their ignorance, or riſk error, by averring that there is no mechanical cauſe; and that the effect depends on a law of nature, which thoſe who are diſpoſed to be civil to the Deity ſay, flows from the mere will of the Deity.

In the ſame way, every man living is ſenſible of the intimate connexion between the ſoul and the body; he feels the ſenſation raiſed in the one by the action of the other, and knows the ready obedience which ſuch parts of the body as are intended for action yield to the will of the ſoul: but how the one acts upon the other, is not only not known, but, one may venture to ſay, not knowable or conceivable by us, until we acquire ſome degree of knowledge of what we are at preſent mere ſtrangers to, the nature of *Soul*, and the nature of *Body*.

A body fit to reflect light and colours, when placed in light, not only returns the rays of light that fall upon it, to the luminous body that enlightened it, but ſends the picture of itſelf quite round the hemiſphere in all directions, and to every point: placing a thouſand, a million of ſuch bodies near one another, each performs the ſame operation; the rays of light and colours come inſtantaneouſly to the ſpectator's eye from each, without being diſturbed or diverted in the paſſage by the numberleſs

rays

rays returned, in different and contrary directions, by the other contiguous bodies. That the Being who contrived this mechaniſm, and created the machine, can explain it, and can give us capacity to comprehend it, is not to be doubted: but until it ſhall be his good pleaſure to do ſo, all we have to do is, to admire his power and ſkill, and thankfully to acknowledge the bleſſing he has beſtowed upon us by this aſtoniſhing machinery.

WHY then, what has man got by the numerous experiments and diſcoveries of later years? Why, ſurely, a more accurate and certain knowledge of many *phænomena* of nature, of many of the works of God, than the ancients had, and a more diſtinct view of the ends and uſes of many pieces and parts of the creation than men were formerly poſſeſſed of: diſcoveries fit to raiſe the moſt high and honourable notions of the Creator, and of his goodneſs to his creatures; and to convince man of his ſhort-ſightedneſs, dependence, and duty.

BUT has man made this improvement of thoſe diſcoveries? Nothing leſs! He makes a pompous muſter to his own vain mind of his knowledge; he looks upon it as his property, acquired by his own ingenuity and induſtry; he prides himſelf on his ſagacity, and hopes by its aſſiſtance to be ſtill richer in wiſdom; and he feels ſo much pleaſure in the purſuit of more knowledge,

knowledge, and takes ſo much joy upon every trifling diſcovery which adds to his ſtore, that he cannot think with patience on the evidence which his increaſe in knowledge gives of his real ignorance and weakneſs, nor on the infinite perfection and goodneſs of the Deity, which that knowledge demonſtrates. Such reflexions would ſhock his vanity; would convince him he had paſſed his life unprofitably; and might determine him to quit his beloved courſe of philoſophizing, or other courſes ſtill more fooliſh; or elſe to perſiſt in them, under a load of anxious doubts which might pall the taſte of his enjoyments.

He muſt be a ſtranger to the exerciſe of the rational faculty, who does not know, that the purſuit of *knowledge* in any ſcience is attended with very ſenſible pleaſure; or who doubts, that a philoſopher, if bleſſed with health, and means, and temperance, may reaſonably propoſe to drive on in the career of life till nature decay, with as much ſatisfaction as any man who does not confidently look for a happy *hereafter*. And as this is the caſe, ſuppoſing a philoſopher engaged in this pleaſurable courſe, it is not to be imagined, that he would quit it willingly, or liſten, without ſome reluctance, to doctrines that ſhould make him uneaſy in it. With ſuch prejudice does almoſt every philoſopher of our days attend to what he daily hears preached, and what the voice of all nature proclaims, of the duties which men owe to their Creator,

Creator, of the regard which he expects from them to his will, and of the certainty of rewards and punishments; and is therefore fertile in objections, to prevent his own and other people's believing these truths.

AND what puts our age in a much more lamentable case than those that were before it is, that whereas the number of philosophers formerly was but very small, the number of pretended philosophers is now immensely great; and whereas books and learning were then in a few hands, at present almost every body can read. The press circulates books very cheap; philosophers from opinion, and wits for bread, publish Atheism; and the half-learned and vitious read. With these the authority of the learned, as well as the objections against doctrines which mens vices may induce them to wish not to be true, go far; and those of inferior learning or rank are glad to follow the opinions, as well as the vices of their betters: so that a man that truly fears God, is at this day almost as great a curiosity as an Atheist was heretofore.

WHAT makes the truth of those reflexions the more sensible, is, that though those philosophers called *Freethinkers* controvert the duties owing to the Deity, and dream of no punishment attendant on the neglect; yet they all pretend to be, and generally are sensible of the social duties, and act up to them better than

than others do who in other reſpects think more juſtly than they. And this comes from the moral ſenſe in them; which they rather encourage than ſtifle on that article, from the vanity of having the good opinion and approbation of mankind, which they court; and from this conſideration, that it is no obſtruction to their purſuits. Whereas, brought up with doubts of the very exiſtence of the Deity; ripening into years, under a total neglect of all duties that may be owing to him; immerged in purſuits and courſes whereof the objects are pretty much incompatible with thoſe duties; and conſcious, that ſuch duties neglected, if there is any real obligation to them, muſt be highly offenſive to the Deity, and attended with certain puniſhment; it is natural for them to wiſh they may have made no miſtake in that article, and that they may not be found debtors to the divine juſtice. And it imports them very much, in reſpect to the future quiet and tranquillity of their lives, if they reſolve to purſue the pleaſures wherein they are engaged, to convince themſelves, if they can, that all apprehenſions of danger from neglect of duties to the Deity are but vain terrors, the device of prieſts, or the dreams of melancholy men.

But if there be ſuch a thing as an intelligent Being, that has employed and diſplayed infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, in the creation of this univerſe; that has with ſtupendous artifice ſtored this globe with every

thing neceſſary, not only for the ſupport, but for the felicity of man; that on all his works has ſtamped characters of the infinite perfections and overflowing goodneſs of the Author; that has given to man, and to him alone of all the viſible creation, that ſhare of his goodneſs, eyes to be entertained with the magnificence, the beauty, the harmony, and the order of the univerſe; to ſee the perfection of the Creator in his works; and to diſcover the infinite obligations he lies under to, and the dependence he has on the goodneſs of his beneficent Maker; that has ſo moulded his heart and ſpirit, as to make pleaſure attendant on admiration, and love and gratitude the neceſſary companions of the ſenſe of favours received; and that has joined to the idea of ingratitude, the ſenſation of horror; and to conſciouſneſs of gratitude, an inward ſatisfaction, that even adds to the reliſh of the favour received: what could have been the view of the Creator in beſtowing thoſe eyes, and that diſpoſition of heart and ſpirit? Was he or was he not to be diſcovered, admired, adored, loved, and reverenced; or was it indifferent to that perfect and beneficent Being, which way his creature employed his eyes, or diſpoſed of his heart? And, on the other hand, how groſs muſt be the folly and guilt of man, who, miſemploying his eyes, and miſapplying his heart, has refuſed to ſee the perfection of God in his works; and, in place of acknowledging with gratitude his obligation and dependence, chuſes

to

to be indebted to nothing but what he calls *Nature* and *Chance*, ſubſtituted by him in the room of God; and beſtows his heart upon vanity, upon the creature in place of the Creator?

If neglects and breaches of the ſocial and moral duties are criminal even in the eyes of Freethinkers, what muſt be the guilt of neglecting the only duty, properly ſpeaking, to God, of denying him the only return which he expects, becauſe it is the only return he has qualified us to make, reverence, love, and gratitude? Ingratitude to men is marked with the blackeſt ſtain; what muſt then that vice be when it has for its object the ſource of all goodneſs? and what chance is there that it ſhall paſs unpuniſhed? It is aſtoniſhing, that men who juſtly look with ſuch horror and deteſtation on murder and parricide, ſhould think ſo coolly on the abnegation of the Deity; which denying him his tribute of reverence and gratitude is. But the inſtances of puniſhment which the magiſtrate, for the preſervation of the ſociety, inflicts, helps to keep up the idea of horror that attends the firſt; and the forbearance of vengeance in the latter, is by weak pretenders to Reaſon made an argument to conclude, that no offence is given.

It is a ſtrange imagination, to admit, that men are formed with ideas of right and wrong, with a ſenſe of duty and the contrary, and

with full phyſical liberty to act as they ſhall beſt like; and yet to maintain, that it is abſolutely indifferent to the Deity, who gave them that rule of conduct, whether they conform to or tranſgreſs it, whether they do right or wrong; and, conſequently, that it is indifferent to them, if they eſcape puniſhment from their fellow-creatures, whether they have or have not conformed themſelves to the rule of their Creator and Sovereign Lord.

THE excellency of the body, the capacity of the underſtanding, the extent of the knowledge of the moſt perfect of the human ſpecies, cannot poſſibly make any impreſſion on the Deity, other than the general complacency that reſults from the ſurvey of his works, and ſeeing that they are good. What a poor figure muſt the parts, the ſagacity, and the knowledge of the admired Sir *Iſaac Newton* make in the eye of the Omniſcient? And how few *Newtons* can mankind boaſt of? Theſe are therefore not the qualities that claim the Deity's regard. But if a rational creature, however limited in underſtanding, or imperfect in body, ſhall have his heart and ſpirit right diſpoſed; ſhall ſee, and, in all his thoughts and actions, acknowledge his dependence on the God that made him; ſhall maintain in his heart a grateful ſenſe of the numberleſs obligations he lies under to that bountiful Being, and ſhall be thoroughly diſpoſed to make the *Will* of that Being the rule of his actions during the whole

courſe

courſe of his life; regardleſs of the pleaſures and ſenſual enjoyment which following this rule may deprive him of, and of the dangers and inconveniences to which purſuing it may expoſe him; in full confidence, that the ſincerity of his heart will be acceptable to, and rewarded by the Creator, who endued it with ſuch diſpoſitions: we muſt neceſſarily conclude, either that the Omniſcient does not know the diſpoſitions and inward actings of the ſpirits of all his creatures, or that the grateful and dutiful heart of ſuch a creature is pleaſing and agreeable to him.

THUS the objects of the complacence of the Almighty amongſt the children of men, may be as numerous as the individuals of the ſpecies. He has given to very few, thoſe diſtinguiſhing parts that provoke the eſteem even of their fellow-creatures; but he has given to all, hearts ſuſceptible of reverence, gratitude, and love; and they have no more to do, but to employ thoſe diſpoſitions towards the proper object, to intitle themſelves to the continuation of his goodneſs and good-will for them. It is remarkable, that the only thing which God claims of man in ſcripture is the *heart*; and it is remarkable alſo, that poſſeſſion of the heart of any of our own, or even of the brute ſpecies, is what ſecures our affection in return. Perſuaſion of the friendſhip or love of any of our fellow-creatures, determines us to ſentiments of the like kind for them; and we cannot

not help, when a dog, a cat, or any other familiar creature ſhews marks of any particular reſpect or fondneſs for us, to have pleaſure in that fondneſs, and to cheriſh the creature in return. Now, though to limit the ſovereign and ſelf-exiſtent Mind, by ſuppoſing that it has juſt ſuch qualities and modifications as ours, would be raſh; yet it would be raſh alſo to aſſert, that there are not in it qualities and diſpoſitions ſimilar to ſuch as are praiſe-worthy and commendable in our own. Nay, the contrary muſt be admitted by all who believe the ſcriptures; which aſſure, that God made man after his own image, and in every page declare his diſlike of ſin, and regard for piety.

But here lies the misfortune: This claim of the Creator to the hearts of his creatures cannot be complied with; becauſe they have already diſpoſed of their hearts in another way. Luſts and follies of very different kinds have got poſſeſſion of their ſpirits, and the gratification of thoſe is the object of their purſuit. Multitudes follow the direction of the temperature of their body, and are ſlaves to the appetites that prevail in them; which chain them to the oar they tug at, by the immediate pleaſure they taſte in obeying the call of thoſe appetites; whilſt the very enjoyment of what they are ſo fond of, deſtroys the appetite, pulls on diſeaſes and peeviſhneſs, with early old age and decay; which muſt be attended with remorſe and horror, if they do not carefully lock out from their thoughts

thoughts all ideas of futurity, and of what ought to have been the object of their purſuits. To talk to ſuch men of duty, whether in the career of their enjoyments, or when they are no longer capable of enjoying what their ſoul took delight in, is to preach to the deaf, at leaſt to ſuch as will undoubtedly ſtop their ears againſt ſounds that muſt be ſo grating and diſagreeable.

And, on the other hand, great numbers, who, from their conſtitution, education, or other circumſtances, have eſcaped the inchantments of ſenſual pleaſures, and have reliſhed the delight that attends the exerciſe of their mental faculties, by much the moſt ſubſtantial, manly, and laſting enjoyment of the two, ſee, with regret and contempt, the brutiſh folly in which their fellow-creatures are engaged. They pity and deſpiſe thoſe groveling mean ſouls, who never once taſted the refined ſatisfaction that reſults from employing the rational powers in the acquiſition of knowledge, and the diſcovery of truth. And by how much ſoever the ſoul exceeds in excellency the body, by ſo much they look upon themſelves to be better and happier than their brethren. In this they glory, in this they are really happy. In their own opinion they are wiſe, and they hope they are ſo in the opinion of all others. On the vanity that reſults from ſuch an empty conceit they feed. They are glad to be thought wiſer and better than they truly are. To gain the eſti-

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mation of their acquaintance, they are charlatans in ſcience, and hypocrites in conduct. The natural deſire of approbation, born with them, they have transferred from God to their fellow-creatures. The applauſe of men, deſerved or undeſerved, blows up their pride. On that, and on their imagined knowledge, they value themſelves; and can have no idea of any ſtate for which they would exchange their own, except one in which they might be more knowing or more eſteemed.

In the whole courſe of the lives of ſuch men, the true direction of the *heart* was never once minded. Senſual enjoyment it might not have for its object, but it had the Creator leſs; and knowledge, with the reputation of knowledge, it ardently breathed after and exulted in. To bring ſuch men to a fixed belief, that the boaſted acquiſition of their lives was no more than vanity, and vexation of ſpirit; that death muſt deliver them over to judgment, for the abuſe of thoſe noble talents which their Maker had beſtowed on them; and that there is no way to eſcape puniſhment, but by baniſhing thoſe vanities from their heart, and yielding it entirely to the God that framed it, would be no eaſy ſpot of work; every power of their mind would be employed in defence of the idol they had carved for themſelves. If religion had preſcribed only prayers, penances, building of churches, or any other tranſient act, its language might have been liſtened to: but, as it will

will be satisfied with nothing less than the *heart*, which is already bestowed, no wonder philosophers are deaf.

To resist the evidence that pours in upon them, from nature, from revelation, from all quarters, in behalf of religion; and to stifle the apprehensions which it must naturally beget, they call in to their assistance that boasted Reason, which qualifies them to judge of God, and of all his works and ways. Him and them they try by that infallible touchstone; and if ought is proposed to be believed of either, which they cannot distinctly comprehend the manner or cause of, the proposition is immediately rejected, as absurd and impossible; or if any difficulty or objection occur to their imagination which cannot instantly be dissolved, the validity of the objection is straightway allowed, and the proposition to which it relates, is condemned. But this is not all. If the proposition condemned has revelation for its support, the whole of revelation, together with the evidence for it, are damned by the lump; because that cannot be the declaration of God, but must be a palpable forgery, which asserts any falshood, or, what is just the same, any thing that does not fall in with the notions of the learned and the wise.

Thus, because Freethinkers cannot conceive how a spirit can exist without a body, or how a body dissolved into dust, and dissipated,

can be reſuſcitated, they doubt of a future ſtate, and deny the reſurrection; though theſe very wiſe men muſt admit, they have no adequate conception of the ſoul, or of its *manner* of exiſtence or acting, or of the way in which it and the body were brought together.

In like manner, what is called the *hypoſtatical union* in Chriſt, is rejected, becauſe the *manner* of it cannot be comprehended by men; who muſt admit the union between ſoul and body in man, and muſt at the ſame time confeſs, they neither do, nor can, whilſt they remain in their preſent condition, conceive how the one operates on the other.

The doctrine of the Trinity ſhares the ſame fate; and with ſome more ſhew of reaſon; as, beſides the difficulty of comprehending the *how* and the *wherefore*, in that doctrine, as commonly expreſſed, there is ſome appearance of contradiction in the terms, which makes it difficult to conceive what is meant to be believed. But this appearance of contradiction is owing, not to the revelation from which the knowledge of that hiſtory is derived, but to the vanity and folly of the doctors of the church; who, puffed up, even as the Freethinkers, with too good an opinion of their own parts, would take upon them to define what revelation does not; and to coin terms not made uſe of in ſcripture, to expreſs their imperfect conceptions. The words *Trinity*, and *Perſon*, or *Hypoſtaſis*, are

are terms not to be met with in the ſacred book: and yet to thoſe terms, and the application of them, the revolt againſt the doctrine is chiefly owing.

WHAT the ſcripture acquaints us with, is this, and no more: That what it characteriſes the FATHER, the avenger of wrong, and rewarder of right, is GOD; that what it characteriſes the SON, the WORD, the Creator of the world, the Redeemer of mankind, ſent for that purpoſe by the Father, is GOD; that the HOLY SPIRIT, the correſpondent with, and Comforter of the ſpirits of men, is GOD; and that nevertheleſs the DEITY, the SELF-EXISTENT BEING, is but ONE. That theſe matters are ſo, the ſcripture expreſsly declares; and the manner in which it expreſſes the laſt propoſition, *Deut.* vi. 4. is worth attending to. Our tranſlators render it, *Hear, O Iſrael, the LORD our God is one LORD.* The original ſays, *JEHOVAH our Gods is one SELF-EXISTENT BEING*; for ſo the word tranſlated *Lord* ſignifies. Now, what is there in our knowledge, in our conceptions, or in our reaſon, that can qualify us to determine the *modus* of the exiſtence, or of the action of the inviſible Deity? That we have no ſort of idea of the ſubſtance of that ſoul which acts in us, or of the manner of its exiſtence or actions, is an agreed point; what impudence then muſt it be in us, to pretend to determine, from our conceptions, or rather in-

ability to conceive, the condition, or manner of exiſtence and acting of the Supreme Being, the leaſt of whoſe works are in very deed beyond our comprehenſion?

THE ancients, leſs refined than we, diſputed about the figure and form of the Deity; and, knowing none more perfect or noble, as they apprehended, than that of man, beſtowed upon the Deity a human ſhape and figure. The impropriety of this groſs imagination we ſee; as we perceive, that the ideas of extenſion, ſhape, and figure, are not applicable to ſpirit, according to the idea which we have of it. But though we have not eyes to diſcover the ſubſtance or properties of ſpirit, does it certainly follow, that they have nothing in them analogous to ſhape or figure; no properties by which they can be diſcerned, and diſtinguiſhed the one from the other, by God, or even by other ſpiritual beings, to whom he may have given eyes and underſtanding fit to perceive what we cannot? And is it not, on the other hand, clear, that there may be ſomewhat analogous to figure, ſome particular *modus* of exiſtence of the Deity, of which our want of ideas will not permit us to form any notion?

HAD nature produced to our view ſuch living creatures as wild fiction can preſent to our fancy, compoſed of three or more diſtinct bodies, abſolutely ſeparated from each other, without

without any bodily connexion, but actuated by one and the same principle, moving by one will, acting with one consent, each affected by the accidents that touch either, the one wounded by the blow that wounds the other, and all dying by the killing of one; we should have had no distinct conception of what the scripture represents concerning the Deity. But then, habituated to the sight of such an extraordinary creation as has been mentioned, the scripture-doctrine would cease to be so shocking as it is to our wise men: and yet, from their knowledge of the machinery of nature, they will hardly take upon them to say, that the Deity could not have created such an animal as has been feigned.

If this reflexion wants any further illustration, let the vision of *Ezekiel*, chap. i. & x. be considered: Four living creatures, which he knew to be the *Cherubim*, actuated by one spirit, moving with one consent whithersoever they would; attended by as many wheels, moving spontaneously in the same manner, because the *spirit* of the *living creature* was in them. This plurality and unity exposed in vision to the Prophet's view, must have lessened his difficulty against admitting the doctrine which so much offends our Freethinkers, because nothing resembling it has ever offered itself to their imagination. It is not necessary at present to inquire, how far the *Cherubim* was the emblem pitched upon by the Deity to repre-

sent

ſent the divine nature, with man united to what the lion in that hieroglyphical figure denoted. It is ſufficient to obſerve, that if ſuch living creatures had exiſted in nature, and had been ſeen and known, as the Prophet ſaw living and acting in viſion, the myſtery exploded by philoſophers would not have been quite ſo incompatible with common notions as they pretend. And therefore it is abſurd for wiſe men, to declare againſt a matter of fact aſſerted by the higheſt authority, for no other reaſon, forſooth, but that their obſervation or experience has preſented them with nothing that ſhould furniſh an adequate idea of it.

UPON the ſame ſort of principles, our modern reaſoners reject the doctrine of Chriſt's ſatisfaction. They cannot conceive how the puniſhment of one who is innocent, ſhould atone for the guilt of another. This to them appears to be contrary to the eſſential juſtice of the Deity, which ought not to take pleaſure in the ſufferings of the innocent; and productive of no good effect, ſuited to the character which they entertain of that exalted Being.

HERE again the temerity of thoſe preſumptuous men is notorious. That juſtice, according to our notions, will not condemn one for the fault of another, is manifeſt. But if the innocent ſhould conſent to ſuffer for the guilty, where is the violation of juſtice in permitting it? If the innocent again has ſome great

great and noble end in view by ſubmitting to that ſuffering, fit to recompenſe a thouſand-fold the grief borne, where is the injuſtice of permitting him to put himſelf in the place of the guilty? If the innocent perſon is all mercy, all bowels, all compaſſion, and can ſuſtain the puniſhment which the broken-hearted repenting criminal cannot; what is ſhocking in the belief, even according to our common notions, that, to comply with the benignity of his nature, he might ſubmit to bear it? It is true we may not ſee ſo clearly why the divine juſtice ſhould be ſatisfied for the offence of one by the ſufferings of another; and that the light of nature would not have led us to diſcover, that we guilty offenders were to be delivered from puniſhment by the ſufferings of another: but is that a reaſon why we ſhould not take God's word for it, if he has been pleaſed to aſſure us that it is ſo? Do we know ſo intimately the nature of his eſſential juſtice, as to be certain that it will not permit him to accept of a vicarious ſatisfaction? Amongſt men, we know, that debt owing by one may be diſcharged by payment made by another; and are we certain, that, in the court of heaven, one man's obligation to juſtice may not be cancelled upon another's voluntary fulfilling of it? He little thinks on the unmeaſurable difference that is between the narrowneſs of the human underſtanding, and the immenſity of the divine, who dares reſt on ſuch concluſions.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER inſtance of mens making their own confined obſervations and conceptions the meaſure and touchſtone of truth, is, the prevailing opinion that diſcards providence, denies a future ſtate, and conſequently renounces the Deity, at leaſt deprives the firſt cauſe of all intelligence.

THIS notable opinion is grafted on obſervation, that the Deity does not interpoſe in any extraordinary manner in the tranſactions of this lower world; that every thing proceeds in it according to the concurrence of natural cauſes; that the ſame events befal the wicked as the virtuous, with the advantage moſt commonly on the ſide of the vitious; that the ſtrongeſt battalions, conducted by the beſt officers, ſucceed in battle; and that vice and villany is triumphant, when conducted by ſkill, without any appearance on the part of God in providence to prevent the effects of the wickedneſs, or to correct the authors of it: and from theſe obſervations the collection is, that all actions are indifferent, and that a future ſtate is a bugbear.

NOW, ſuppoſing theſe obſervations preciſely true, and that there is not the leaſt interpoſition of the Deity in this world, what is the neceſſary conſequence? Whether that all actions are indifferent, in flat contradiction to the cleareſt feeling and perception of the ſoul; or that there muſt be a future ſtate, in which the actors muſt ſeverally be diſtinguiſhed by rewards

wards and punishments? If there are such things as right and wrong, if the Deity is intelligent, and if justice is an attribute of that Being, the last must necessarily be the true conclusion. But as the admitting it might be attended with some uneasy apprehensions, and might require a change of heart and conduct, the moral sense, the most intimate conviction, must be smothered, and intelligence and justice denied to the infinitely perfect Being.

But, after all, on what is this important proposition, That the Almighty has absolutely abandoned all sublunary things to the direction of chance, founded? Why just on this, That none of our wise men have seen any miracles wrought of late times; and they are not disposed to think it possible, that any could have been wrought in the more early; and it is a truth not to be contested, that the unjust succeed in this world, fully as well as the just.

But if they were to be asked, Whether they are certain, that no cause has interposed in the producing any event but what they have observed? and whether they are sure, that there are no secret springs in providence, unseen and unthought of by them, to which important events are owing? if they would not be laughed at, they must answer in the negative; which is enough to destroy the certainty of their position.

BUT to examine the thing more carefully, they muſt diſtinguiſh between individuals of the human ſpecies, and ſtates and kingdoms; which by us are conſidered in ſome ſort as individuals, and may be ſo by the Ruler of the univerſe. Though men be not puniſhed or rewarded here, they may meet with what they deſerve hereafter. But if ſtates and kingdoms are not to meet with any correction in this world, they cannot be conſidered as proper objects of it in another.

Now, it is a certain truth, that all ſtates and kingdoms, in proportion as they grow great, wealthy, and powerful, grow wanton, wicked, and oppreſſive. And the hiſtory of all ages gives evidence of the fatal cataſtrophe of all ſuch ſtates and kingdoms, when the cup of their iniquity was full: nor is it poſſible to ſhew, that any one ſtate or kingdom has been overturned that did not deſerve it at the hand of Providence; however little they may have deſerved it at the hand of the tyrant or oppreſſor who brought their calamity upon them. In this argument it is not neceſſary to ſay, that no unjuſt war ever proſpered. Providence may make uſe of the vitious and wicked diſpoſition of any prince, or of the ruler of any ſtate, to execute juſtice upon a power fated to puniſhment. And the only queſtion which the adverſaries to Providence have to anſwer, is, How they can be ſure, that thoſe deſerved judgments were the effect of mere fortuity, without the

leaſt

leaſt intervention on the part of the Lord of the univerſe?

THE courſe of providence with reſpect to individuals of the human ſpecies undergoes a very different conſideration, and ought to be viewed in a light which no Freethinker ever thought of. If by happineſs and proſperity in this world is meant, wealth, and power, and enjoyment of all pleaſures, and ſucceſs in all purſuits; it may be ſafely allowed, that the beſt man is not the happieſt or moſt proſperous: but if by happineſs and proſperity is meant, the full and quiet enjoyment of all the pleaſures that man, conſidered as a rational being, is capable of; and ſucceſs in all the purſuits in which, as a reaſonable creature, he ought to engage; there is no doubt, that the good man will be found to be the moſt compleatly happy; and with that good man as little doubt, that the Maker and Sovereign Lord of man has not abandoned the care of him to blind chance.

THE man who, forgetting all regards for the Author of his being and happineſs, centers all his views upon himſelf; who, born with a vigorous body and keen appetites, ſucceeds to, or acquires means to gratify all his brutal deſires, and plunges into the enjoyment of whatever his luſt directs him to, is not, in the eyes even of the moſt freethinking philoſopher, happy. His purſuits, as well as his enjoyments, are mean and beaſtly; ſurfeits and

accidental diſeaſes interrupt the courſe of his felicity; age, with its attendant infirmities, diſſolve the charm that bound him; pleaſures of all ſorts loſe their reliſh; and the terrors which death unavoidable muſt bring, are no way to be evited, but by baniſhing all thoughts of death from the mind. Such a man's poſſeſſions and enjoyments cannot denote him happy; nor would a wiſe man pray for theſe bleſſings as the portion with which he was to be contented, unleſs he might obtain this other boon, that he ſhould never decay nor die.

No philoſopher that breathes the air, is ſo ſilly as to maintain, that the objects of the purſuits of the avaritious, or of the ambitious, whether in the political or martial way, are objects fit for the purſuit of a rational creature; or that ſucceſs in thoſe purſuits is fit to denote ſuch a creature happy. And if they will take an impartial view of their own boaſted felicity; if they will draw up a fair account of the ſum of their learning and knowledge, and of the happineſs they have taſted in the acquiſition and enjoyment of thoſe bleſſings; and if they will candidly ſet againſt it the diſcoveries they muſt have made of the ſcantineſs of their knowledge, the weakneſs of their underſtanding, and their neceſſary dependence on ſomewhat not within themſelves for their exiſtence, which they never have thought fit to acknowledge; or, however, adding to thoſe reflexions, the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of what may come after:

after: the balance of the account will doubtleſs ſtand on the wrong ſide; and will ſhew, that though they have been more happy, or rather leſs miſerable than the profligate of the higher or lower claſs of mankind, yet neither their purſuits nor acquiſitions can give them any title to conſider themſelves, or to be conſidered by others, as really happy.

Now, on the other hand, let the caſe of that man be conſidered, who, delivered from the ſlavery of thoſe vices and follies, and acquainted with the end for which he was created, endeavours with all his powers to anſwer the deſign. Such a one taſtes the ſame pleaſure in all ſenſual enjoyments as the greateſt epicure; and has as quick a reliſh of all mental joys that proceed from the purſuit, or from the diſcovery of truth, as the greateſt philoſopher.

But then he ſees, with the philoſopher, that thoſe ſenſual enjoyments are mean and beaſtly, unworthy of the purſuit of rational creatures; that they are annexed to the performance of the animal functions, to induce men to do acts neceſſary for their own preſervation, and the propagation of the ſpecies; but which they never would think of, but for the appetites implanted in them, and the pleaſure which attends the gratification of the appetites; and that ſatiety and uneaſineſs accompanies the purſuit of thoſe pleaſures any farther than nature requires.

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AND he ſees, by the exerciſe of his rational powers, what few philoſophers attend to, that the eyes of his mind were given him to diſcover the immenſity, the power, the wiſdom, and the goodneſs of the Creator in his works; to diſcover the overflowing bounty of that perfect Being to him, and his conſtant dependence on the Author and Source of his happineſs; to diſcover the numberleſs obligations he lies under, with reverence and gratitude, to obey and to adore the Sovereign of the univerſe; to diſcover his duty towards his fellow-creatures, as well as towards his Creator; to diſcover, that the favour of the Almighty muſt attend performance of duty, as his diſpleaſure muſt follow the ungrateful breach of it; to diſcover, that the favour of God is the only object worthy of the purſuit of the heart of man; and to diſcover, that the beſtowing that heart, and all the deſires of it, on ſenſual brutiſh pleaſures, or any other vanity, to the excluſion of the *Eternal*, is the moſt horrid, as well as the moſt fooliſh crime that can be imagined.

THE pleaſures of life are enjoyed by this man with as much, perhaps with more reliſh, than by the libertine. But then they do not pervert the heart. The only motion they are capable of exciting there, is, gratitude and thankfulneſs to the beneficent Donor. The acquiſition of knowledge is taſted by him with as much delight as it is by the philoſopher; though it produces in them very different effects.

fects. The one it puffs up with pride and presumption; the other it fills with humility, and reverence for the Moſt High.

THE man who has fixed his heart upon the proper object, does not ceaſe to taſte with pleaſure the common bleſſings of this life; neither does he fail to beſtow the proper induſtry to acquire, and to preſerve them. But then he conſiders them only as ſo many ſugar-plums given by the Creator to make his confinement to his priſon of clay more palatable; which muſt have an end when his enlargement begins. He laments the unhappy condition of thoſe who ſeek after them as their chief good. He would neither acquire nor preſerve them at the expence of doing one ſingle act that might forfeit the favour of his Maker and Benefactor: neither does he repine at the privation of them; knowing, that it could not happen without the will and pleaſure of his Lord and Maſter, the Sovereign of the univerſe, to which his heart and will chearfully ſubmit.

COMPARE the happineſs of this man with that of the greateſt favourite of fortune, who has ſet his heart on other objects, and who has had the full gratification of all his appetites, ſo far as the courſe of humanity will permit; but who muſt die, and leave thoſe enjoyments, uncertain what is to happen hereafter. This man enjoys, in common with the wiſe and the voluptuous of his rank in the world, all the ſenſual

ſual and mental pleaſures in which they delight, without the alloy that muſt torture their minds, when they think of parting with them. But then he has in himſelf a conſtant ſource of unalloyed joy, to which they are utter ſtrangers. The abundant goodneſs of the Giver of all thoſe bleſſings, fills his ſoul with gratitude and thankfulneſs, and diſpoſes him with joy to do what appears to him to be his duty; and conſciouſneſs of that happy diſpoſition produces the moſt firm confidence and reliance on the favour and good-will of his omnipotent Benefactor; from which he is to look hereafter for joys of a different nature from thoſe which in this life he ſlights, when they ſtand in the way of his duty. Every act of duty performed, fills his ſoul with a placid, ſtill ſatisfaction, that is ſenſibly felt, though not eaſily expreſſed. A mouthful of meat beſtowed on a hungry beggar, gives the heart of the donor more real ſatisfaction, than the reliſh of the food gives pleaſure to the craving ſtomach, or the moſt delicious dainty gives to the vitiated palates of the voluptuous. And the particular excellency of theſe enjoyments is, that no exceſs can ſurfeit or pall the appetite, no accident can deprive him of them.

To a man poſſeſſed of ſuch an incorruptible ſtock of happineſs, the pleaſures of this life appear but mere baubles; and the privation of them a trifling loſs. Life itſelf he is diſpoſed to

to reſign with willingneſs, becauſe to him death has no ſting.

If then felicity, even in this life, does not depend upon what are called the gifts of fortune, but on the diſpoſition of ſoul that has been deſcribed, with what countenance can any Freethinker maintain, that in this world there is no interpoſition of the act of the Deity, no ſpecial providence? It may indeed be true, that wealth, and honours, and power do not attend the moſt deſerving; and that halters, and infamy, and want do not lay hold on the vitious: but will it follow, from our not being able to ſee the hand of Providence in the diſtribution of thoſe periſhing favours on which the real happineſs of man does not depend, that the Framer of the hearts of men has no communication with them, and never interpoſes to determine them to that wherein their chief felicity conſiſts?

The proofs of the goodneſs and juſtice of God, of the duty and dependence of man, of the certainty of rewards and puniſhments, of the deſperate condition of thoſe who, neglecting God and their duty, purſue fading pleaſures and vanity with their whole ſpirit; and of the real and permanent happineſs of ſuch as enjoy all the gifts of God with thankfulneſs, and gratefully make it the buſineſs of their lives to obey his will and to obtain his favour, are ſo conſpicuous, that nothing ſeems to be wanted

towards their producing *conviction*, but ſomewhat that ſhall turn their eye, and fix the attention upon them; becauſe, if they are duly conſidered and attended to, the evidence is irreſiſtible. Now, as that attention may be raiſed by various incidents, ſometimes by ſickneſs and diſtreſſes of different kinds, ſometimes by a happy education, ſometimes by the converſation of pious perſons, and ſometimes by reading and meditation, which a thouſand circumſtances ſeemingly accidental concur to improve; why ſhould we conclude, that all theſe incidents are purely accidental; and that the perſon transformed, by them, from a miſerable brute to a happy man, owes the change to blind chance? Whatever vain reaſoners may imagine or bable, the perſon whoſe eyes are opened by thoſe incidents, acknowledges with gratitude the hand of God in them.

BUT though Freethinkers might be excuſed for concluding, however raſhly, that Providence does not interpoſe in the government of the external tranſactions of this world, becauſe, after all the obſervations they can make, they have not compleat evidence to the contrary; yet what excuſe can they have for pretending to judge, that the merciful and beneficent Spirit of God does not work upon the ſpirits of men? From their proper experience they can draw no obſervation, as they have locked out all regards for the Deity from their heart; and what paſſes in the ſpirits of other men they can have

no knowledge of, nor indeed any idea, as they have ſuffered no ſuch tranſactions to take place in their own.

PHILOSOPHERS have talked much of action and reaction in matter, and imagine they underſtand what they ſay; what ſhould hinder them to believe, that there may be ſuch a thing as action and reaction between ſpirits, even between the infinitely perfect Spirit and the ſpirits of finite men? If gratitude obſerved in a dog produces ſome regard and kindneſs in the mind of his maſter, why may not the gratitude, the warmth of the heart of man, work ſome ſimilar effect in the all-ſeeing Mind? and who dare preſume to ſay, that it may not act on, and comfort the ſpirit of man in return? If that beneficent and all-powerful Spirit does not ſhew his kindneſs in beſtowing wealth, and power, and fading pleaſures; it is becauſe they are not real goods; becauſe they are not the object of the heart and wiſhes of the party favoured; and becauſe, in place of doing them real good, they might call off the affections from that exerciſe wherein his true felicity conſiſts. And this is ſo true, that croſſes, diſappointments, and diſtreſſes, may juſtly be conſidered as acts of the greateſt kindneſs, when they tend to recal the ſtraying mind from vanity, and to fix it on its proper object.

How then dares preſumptuous ſhort-ſighted man deny the interpoſition of Providence, be-

cauſe he does not ſee the ſecret ſpring by which it acts, or know the intentions of the Inſcrutable? Or how can he, becauſe a ſatisfactory reaſon does not appear to him for the long-ſuffering patience and forbearance of the Moſt Merciful, doubt of the exiſtence or juſtice of that Being; deny a future ſtate; or maintain the indifference of all actions, as to right and wrong? But ſuch is the fatal effect of the corruption of man's heart, and of the deflection of it from the true object to vice and vanity.

THE extreme folly of modern Freethinkers is much leſs accountable or excuſable than that of the ancients. The ancients had no certain lights but thoſe of nature. Thoſe naturally led them to ſee the vanity of the purſuits wherein they were engaged, the depravity of the human nature, and the conſequences which might attend their courſes hereafter. Thoſe were but melancholy reflexions, leading to deſpair, and tending to ſour every enjoyment; as they had no certain intimation, that any method was chalked out by the Deity for the expiation of ſin, and for reſtoring offending man to his favour and protection. And therefore it is not to be wondered at, that they baniſhed from their thoughts ſuch gloomy uncomfortable ſpeculations. But our modern madmen hear every day of mercy and pardon offered by the offended Deity to offending ſinners, if they will receive it thankfully. They are told, that this is the declared will of God, and that there is

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compleat evidence of its being ſuch; and they ſee, that this is the belief of numbers of the moſt ſagacious and inquiſitive of their fellow-creatures. But all this will not do. Their heart is given to other objects; and they hear, that theſe muſt be diſmiſſed before they can ſhare of the pardon proffered.

To keep however their countenance, and the character of Freethinkers, they muſt aſſign ſome reaſon for their revolting againſt revelation. And this they readily do. They ſay, falſely, that they have carefully examined all the evidence for revelation; and they ſay, honeſtly and truly, that all the evidence which they have conſidered, has not been ſufficient to ſatisfy their objections, and to convince them, that what is called revelation is really ſuch.

THAT they have carefully examined *all* the evidence, is abſolutely falſe. No man ever did, or can do ſo, without receiving perfect conviction. It is a queſtion, whether any profeſſed Freethinker who has hitherto appeared, had learning or talents ſufficient to examine the evidence. It is certain, that none who have wrote, have diſcovered that they had either.

MEN may ſearch for arguments *à priori* for the proof of any propoſition that may reſult from the nature of things known to them. That treachery to our neighbour, and ingratitude to the God that made us, are highly offenſive,

fenſive, and ought to be puniſhed by perfect juſtice, may be demonſtrated *à priori*. But if ſovereign goodneſs and mercy, to deliver repenting men from deſerved puniſhment, has contrived a method of ſalvation by ſending his Son to the world to ſuffer for them; and if, to prevent their deſpair, and to encourage their repentance and amendment, that beneficent Being has been pleaſed to publiſh his pardon, with the conditions of it, to mankind; this muſt be admitted to be a matter of fact not diſcoverable by any inductions *à priori*; becauſe it is in ſome ſort adverſary to our general notions of right and wrong; and therefore, to have any effect on the minds of men, muſt have been publiſhed with ſuch a degree of evidence, as muſt neceſſarily gain full belief; and if it was the intention of the Author of this publication, that it ſhould gain belief in future ages, the evidence muſt be of that nature that is fit to carry conviction to all for whom the publication was intended.

ACCORDINGLY this revelation, which was made ſoon after the firſt tranſgreſſion, was renewed from time to time, under circumſtances ſo diſtinguiſhed, as could not poſſibly leave any doubt, that it was the declaration of the Deity. And, by wiſdom and power more than human, ſuch a ſort of evidence has been contrived and preſerved for the authority of that revelation, as far exceeds, in point of certainty, the proof of any other event that ever happened. That ſuch

ſuch cities as *Babylon* and *Carthage* exiſted; that *Cæſar* won the battle of *Pharſalia*, and was murdered in the *Roman* ſenate, no one doubts. But if all the documents for the authority of revelation were brought together, the proof in this laſt caſe is by ſo much ſtronger than that in the others, as the belief of it is more intereſting to mankind.

BUT the different degrees of credit given to the one and to the other, ariſe from the different diſpoſitions of the hearts of men. There is no prejudice in the mind of man againſt admitting the firſt; againſt the laſt there is this violent bias, that if it is admitted, men muſt become in their own eyes miſerable wretches, and muſt diſmiſs thoſe luſts and vanities on which they doated. To prevent this diſgrace and irreparable damage, arms muſt be taken up againſt the evidence that inſults their quiet; any objection, (of which there are, and muſt be multitudes), if it cannot eaſily be anſwered, is a demonſtration ſuperior to all the evidence for revelation; and they look in to revelation, and to the evidence for it, only to arm themſelves with ſuch objections.

IT is indeed no wonder, that men whoſe prejudices ſtand ſo much in the way of believing, do not give themſelves the trouble to ſearch after, and to collect *all* the proofs for revelation. It is a laborious work. All the remains of ancient hiſtory, and the compoſures

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of the learned of thoſe times, muſt be examined; all the rites, opinions, and practices of nations, ſo far as they can be diſcovered, muſt be conſidered; all the monuments of antiquity now extant, muſt be ſurveyed; a reaſonable knowledge of the languages in which revelation is recorded, muſt be attained; and the conſequences that have attended that revelation ſince the advent of Chriſt, muſt be adverted to, before one can ſay that he is poſſeſſed of all the evidence, and before he can form a judgment of many of the objections which Freethinkers move. But that none of them who have wrote, have given themſelves this trouble, is plain from their writings; which contain little more than ſmatterings of learning, to which the *Jews* have helped them, and which they ſeem, without due examination, to have taken on truſt.

THOUGH it has pleaſed the merciful wiſdom of God, to ſcatter proofs of his revelation over all the ancient nations, and to preſerve documents of them down to our days, for the conviction of obſtinate infidels, and for the confirmation of the faith of the inquiſitive who believe; yet, happily for the bulk of mankind, who have neither time nor talents for ſuch inquiries, revelation is ſo calculated, as to require nothing of man that his conſcious ſoul does not ſee to be his duty; and to promiſe him nothing that does not appear to his moſt inward ſenſe to be the neceſſary conſequence of doing it.

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By it he is acquainted with his forlorn condition; which he needs do no more to diſcover to be truth, than to turn his eyes inward upon himſelf. And a remedy is pointed out adequate to the diſeaſe: which tends to magnify the mercy, the wiſdom, and the goodneſs of the Creator; and to tie the creature to him, by ſtill ſtronger bonds of duty and gratitude.

In this ſyſtem there is ſuch harmony between duty and intereſt, and therefore ſuch a propenſity in every ſober-thinking perſon to wiſh it to be true, that, from the declared opinions of others, better qualified to judge of the evidence, and to determine, it gains belief; and that very belief, influencing the practice, brings real tranquillity and happineſs in this life, ſpringing from confidence of the favour of the Almighty; a ſure earneſt of future felicity. But by the debauched and the giddy, who have delivered themſelves over ſoul and body to their luſts, and to their vanity, this aptitude, this harmony is not diſcovered. Their fears make them wiſh it may not be true. Objections are rife in every corner; and if any inquiry is made into the proofs, it is with an intent to object, and to find them inſufficient.

And one of the main objections is, That there is place for any objection againſt the certainty of revelation. Why, ſay thoſe reaſoners, if it had been the intention of the Al-

mighty, that what is called the revelation of his will ſhould have been believed by all mankind to be ſuch, he would have accompanied it with ſuch evidence as ſhould have been at firſt ſight ſuperior to all objections, and muſt have convinced and converted all infidels: but ſince he has not done ſo, but, on the contrary, room is left for many objections, the concluſion is juſt, that this pretended revelation is none of his. And it muſt be admitted, the inference would be pretty juſt, on ſuppoſal of the propoſition, That it was the intention of the Deity to convince and convert all infidels, however wicked and reprobate. For it is not to be controverted, that it was in the power of the Almighty to have accompanied revelation with conſtant ſtanding miracles, even as it was in his power to have created man with a ſmaller ſhare of free-will, and, by perpetual interpoſition of his grace, to have prevented his actual defection from his duty. But upon what principle is it ſuppoſed, that God intended, or ought to have intended, to extend his grace alike to all; to the obſtinate and flagitious, as well as to the ſober and the humble ſinner? The diſcretion of men makes a wide difference between thoſe characters; and how can we be ſure, that the judgment of God does not ſo alſo?

THE mercy of God has provided an atonement ſufficient to expiate the ſins of all mankind, who will take hold of it. The wiſdom of

of God has contrived evidence ſufficient to convince all mankind, that ſuch atonement is provided, if they will give themſelves the trouble to examine it. But then it is ſo contrived, as to reach with conviction thoſe only who are diſpoſed to take hold of it; that is, the meek and the humble, who are conſcious of their diſtreſs by nature, and deſirous to be delivered from it. And them it reaches, becauſe they think it worth their while to inquire after, and to examine it; whilſt it does not convince, nor indeed can it poſſibly, the proud and the ſtubborn, who ſlight the atonement provided ſo much, and are ſo thoroughly averſe to comply with the condition upon which it is to be obtained, that without troubling their heads with the evidence, they inſolently reject the mercy of the Moſt High. Who then can find fault with the divine goodneſs on this article? The meek ſurely will not; and the proud, who have themſelves only to blame, ought not.

So the ſum of the wiſe objection is this, That the good and juſt God did not intend, that ſalvation ſhould reach thoſe deſperately wicked ſinners who refuſed to accept of it. But this objection weighs with thoſe who have never turned their thoughts upon the heinouſneſs of their own guilt; and have formed to themſelves notions of the benignity of the Deity, from the falſe notions of generoſity which they

have encouraged in themſelves, laying entirely aſide his juſtice and his purity.

FROM the ſame ſource ſprings another objection, of equal validity as to revelation, founded on the doctrine of the perpetuity of puniſhment. Here again the incomprehenſible, the infinitely perfect Being, is meaſured by the ſpan of the low, blind, groveling creature that makes the objection; who, becauſe he cannot comprehend why this juſtice is ſuited to the divine nature, concludes at once, that the doctrine is impoſſible, and therefore falſe; and, in conſequence, rejects the revelation which is ſaid to aſſert it, without giving himſelf the trouble to examine the evidence that ſupports that revelation, or to inquire whether the matter that thus ſhocks him, is really revealed. A careful inquiry might poſſibly ſatisfy him, that the perpetuity of puniſhments is not abſolutely affirmed; and that no more is neceſſarily to be inferred from revelation, than that the miſery of the damned is to endure for ages. But ſuch an inquiry would give him competent ſatisfaction, that the revelation he wantonly rejects, is in very deed the word of God; and would diſpoſe him to believe whatever it clearly declares concerning the Deity and his ways, without conſidering how far that might or might not tally with his conceits.

AND herein lies the monſtrous, the ſurpriſing folly of the vain philoſopher. Every new

new obſervation, every diſcovery, which his ſagacity has been accidentally led to make in nature, and which blows up his pride, becomes to him a freſh proof of his own weakneſs and ſhort-ſightedneſs, and of the immenſity of the Deity, of the perfection of his wiſdom, and of the inſcrutability of his ways to man in his preſent condition: and yet, from his narrow notions, he will pretend to decide what God ought, or ought not; what he can, or cannot do.

In the pittance of the material world which falls within his ken, the obſervations of the infinite wiſdom, contrivance, and power of the Creator, daily grow upon him; new and unaccountable properties in matter, acting by unerring rules, and tending to the perfection of the whole, hourly pour in upon him; the magnet, the microſcope, the teleſcope, the priſm, the air-pump, the crucible, electricity, *&c.* furniſh him with compleat evidence, that he knows nothing of the real nature of *matter*, which he ſees, taſtes, and feels, whereof he is in part compoſed, and in which he is at preſent immerſed; and give him undoubted reaſons to conclude, that there may be, or rather that there are numberleſs other properties in matter, and rules of acting which it ſteadily purſues, of which he at preſent has no knowledge, and poſſibly, ſo long as he is confined to clay, never can.

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By what means then is he to judge of the ſpiritual world, of which he neither has, nor can have any adequate idea? A ſpirit acting in himſelf he feels, and is conſcious of its actings; but what it is compoſed of, or how it acts, is all hidden from him. That there may be as many different claſſes of *ſpirits* as there are tribes of animals or plants, he dare not deny; though he can have no conception of the manner of their difference, or of the uſes for which they may be in the creation. That the Creator is ſpiritual, he collects with certainty from the aſtoniſhing wiſdom and artifice of ſo much of the univerſe as is diſcloſed to him; that he is good and bountiful in a ſovereign degree, his works declare; and that he is poſſeſſed of all poſſible perfections, his ſelf-exiſtence demonſtrates. But whence comes man to take upon him to determine, what perfection in any of his attributes is; that the juſtice of God muſt go thus far, and no farther; that his mercy requires he ſhould, or ſhould not do this or that; or that his goodneſs ought, or ought not to operate on ſuch an occaſion? This, ſure, is the moſt aſtoniſhing preſumption! Suppoſing him to have an adequate idea of juſtice, mercy, and goodneſs, as thoſe muſt be by the Deity exerciſed in ſupreme harmony, as well as perfection; how dare he preſume to define, how far the exerciſe of either of them may go? Common ſenſe, and that modeſty which ought to attend conſciouſneſs of our dimneſs of ſight, would direct us, when any thing in the ways

or will of God appears that we cannot account for, to receive and acquiesce in it with humble submission, and to believe that it is right and just.

WHEREFORE, when we see the whole brute creation, animate as well as inanimate, pursuing constantly, and without erring, the intention of God in their formation; and when we observe, in that part of the rational creation which is known to us, the highest disorder and confusion, rebellion against God, injustice towards men, fraud and falshood triumphant, virtue and sincerity despised and oppressed, and guilt contracted that must necessarily terminate in punishment, all the consequence of the freedom of will in man; let us not conclude, as madmen are apt to do, that all actions are indifferent to the Deity, or that no punishment is to attend guilt, upon a supposal, that it would have been unbecoming the benignity of God, who must have foreseen the consequence of free-will in man, to have brought into the world so many millions of rational creatures, who he foresaw must become the objects of wrath and punishment.

NOTHING is more certain, than that free-will has been the cause of transgression in man; and that the Deity must have foreknown the effects it was to produce. But are we sure, that, in the scale of essential justice, it was not right and just, to have created man in a state of happiness, with a fitness and capacity to preserve

ſerve that ſtate, and to acquire one higher, and with a power to chuſe between good and evil; with a ſanction, that if he preferred evil to good, he muſt bear the diſmal conſequences of that perverſe choice? Do we perfectly know the nature of the ſovereignty and right which the Creator has to diſpoſe of the creatures which he has made? Or are we acquainted with all the motives that induced the Moſt High to create man ſo qualified? Is it certain, that no good effect, worthy the divine goodneſs, to other parts of the unbounded creation, could have flowed from the fate of man? Or is it clear, that we are intitled to judge of the fitneſs or unfitneſs of any part of God's ways or works, without conſidering the relation it has to, and the effect it has on the whole? Until theſe queſtions meet with ſatisfactory anſwers, nothing can be more ſilly than to conclude as Freethinkers do.

A ſober man, on the contrary, who ſees and laments the diſorders of mankind, will not give up the moral ſenſe of his ſoul as to the merit or demerit of human actions; nor will he give up the juſtice or goodneſs of God, becauſe he cannot preciſely aſſign the motive that induced the Deity to endue man with that proportion of free-will with which he is poſſeſſed. Full conviction of the infinite diſproportion that is between his limited underſtanding, and that of the ſelf-exiſtent Being, leads him to conclude with certainty, that his not being able to comprehend

prehend any thing, is not evidence that the Moſt High cannot. He may entertain himſelf profitably, at leaſt pleaſantly, in meditating on ſuch ſubjects: but, though his invention ſhould fail of ſolving the difficulty, he will not on that account deny principles, nor impeach the juſtice or goodneſs of his Maker.

THAT the end of God in creating man, endued with free-will, and with that proportion of reaſon, and of appetites, wherewith he was poſſeſſed, was not to diſcover to himſelf what uſe man was to make of thoſe talents, muſt be evident to all who admit the omniſcience and preſcience of the Deity. But it is not ſo evident, that one of the motives of the Creator for framing man ſo qualified, may not have been, to render his juſtice and his mercy conſpicuous to mankind; and to ſhew thoſe attributes, as well as the effects of free-will left to chuſe between the dictates of Reaſon and the bent of appetites, to other claſſes of rational beings, to us at preſent unknown.

HAD all the rational creation unerringly purſued the dictates of Reaſon, that is, had they unerringly done their duty, there would have been no occaſion for diſplaying the juſtice or the mercy of God. His immenſity, his eternity, his aſtoniſhing power, goodneſs, and wiſdom, were legible in his works; and it ſeems unreaſonable to doubt, that one of the ends of the creation was, to exhibit to rational

creatures compleat evidence of thoſe glorious attributes and qualities. But unleſs ſome rational creature had offended, there could have been no example of juſtice, nor any object for mercy.

BEFORE any treſpaſs committed, every rational being that ſuppoſed revolting againſt ſovereign goodneſs poſſible, muſt have concluded, that the guilty deſerved to be, and would be purſued by the vengeance of the Omnipotent. But in what manner juſtice required that this vengeance ſhould be exerted, it could have no comprehenſion of; far leſs could it have any conception, that eſſential juſtice ungratefully affronted, ſhould ſuffer thoughts of mercy to interpoſe in behalf of the inſolent offender, and ſhould deviſe a method, conſiſtent with juſtice, to deliver the criminal from puniſhment, and reſtore him to his priſtine favour.

BUT the abuſe of free-will has given occaſion to the manifeſtation of thoſe divine qualities, which otherwiſe might have remained unknown to men and angels, in a light ſo diſtinguiſhed, as muſt needs produce admiration, with praiſe and adoration, and give a more noble and intereſting idea of the perfection of the Deity.

WE know but too well, that man has fallen; and the ſcripture acquaints us with the revolt of ſome of the angels. Their crime, we

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are told, met with inſtant condemnation and puniſhment, but man's with a very different uſage. The convicted and aſhamed offender had hopes of mercy immediately given him. Infinite wiſdom found means to ſatisfy eſſential juſtice, and to make way for the diſplay of mercy, that glorious and adorable attribute of the Moſt High.

THE cauſe of this diverſity we can but gueſs at. The weakneſs of man, and the temptations he was liable to, we know; but the condition and temptation of the tranſgreſſing angels, we are not acquainted with. If we may however conjecture, their knowledge, capacity, and power was far beyond that of man; and conſequently their defection leſs excuſable: and accordingly we find, their condemnation was by ſo much the more prompt and ſevere. Whereas, with reſpect to man, the execution of the ſentence againſt him was ſuſpended; mercy was offered; a method of reconciliation with the Deity was ſet on foot; repeated intimations were made by the clement Deity of this purpoſe of grace; repeated and renewed inſtitutions were backed by divine authority, to recal men to their duty; the ſovereign and eſſentially juſt Lord of the univerſe was pleaſed to proclaim himſelf merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering and patient; and, through a long ſucceſſion of ages, that declaration has by experience been found to be ſtrictly true. His long-ſuffering, accompanied with continual invita-

tions to accept of pardon, endures to this moment, to the inexpreſſible joy of thoſe that love and fear him; though it muſt at leaſt turn to the utter confuſion of thoſe who heedleſsly or wilfully reject the proffered grace.

In the treatment of the fallen angels, for whom we know no ſhadow of excuſe, nothing but ſtrict juſtice appears. In the treatment of man, the ſeverity of the juſtice of the Eternal is made conſpicuous, chiefly by the atonement which his mercy has provided to expiate the guilt, and avoid the puniſhment of unhappy creatures. But that boundleſs pity and compaſſion, that eſſential mercy, and that unwearied patience, which has been, and ſtill is exerciſed towards ungrateful man, could never have appeared to men and angels, if the abuſe of free-will had not given occaſion for the diſplay of it.

It is idle to inquire, becauſe it ſeems impoſſible to diſcover, what gave occaſion to the revolt of the fallen angels. But it is probable, their ſudden and ſevere puniſhment has prevented treſpaſſes of the like nature. That exertion of the juſtice and power of the Eternal muſt have made a deep impreſſion upon all ſpirits of the angelick order. And if the rectitude of the remaining choir is owing to the puniſhment of the rebellious crew, who will preſume to find fault with God, for giving angels ſuch a portion of free-will as to leave them

them fallible, or for reſorting to rigid juſtice for the puniſhment of their offence?

HAD man, upon his firſt offence, been treated as he deſerved; had threatened death immediately followed his crime, there would have been an end of the ſpecies: but there would have been no inſtance of the mercy, the tender-heartedneſs, the long-ſuffering of the Sovereign Being; none to ſing his praiſes, or to bleſs him, on account of that divine attribute. As his perfect wiſdom and exuberant grace has contrived it, millions of the human race who have taſted of his goodneſs in this reſpect, feaſt their ſouls on the contemplation of his amazing condeſcendence, and with their whole ſpirit adore and bleſs him.

AND if it cannot be doubted, that the end of the formation of myriads of various plants, and other inanimate productions, is, to give to intelligent minds ſome ſort of idea of the wiſdom, the power, and the goodneſs of the Creator; why will conceited men quarrel with the divine œconomy regarding the human race? ſince without that part of it to which they object, there could have been no tolerable idea of the mercy or the long-ſuffering of the Deity, nor any heart to rejoice, or tongue to bleſs him, on that account.

BUT this reflexion goes ſtill farther. We have heard of other rational creatures, beſides ourſelves,

ourſelves, under the appellation of *angels*; ſome of whom fell, as we have done: and we know not whether any, or what diverſity there may be of kinds amongſt them. This much however may be concluded, that we cannot with any certainty determine, that there may not be between the ſupreme Being and us a vaſt variety of rational beings diſtinct from the human ſpecies, and differing from it as to the extent of underſtanding, affections, and inclinations; and conſidering the immenſity of the univerſe, the high probability is, that ſuch beings there are.

Now, if it may be further ſuppoſed, that thoſe rational beings have any cogniſance of what happens amongſt the children of men, why may we not alſo ſuppoſe, that their information on this grand article was one of the ends in view with the Creator, when man was framed with that capacity to err that brought on the fall?

THAT angels, who are believed to have been formed very pure and perfect, were poſſeſſed of free-will, is plain; becauſe they made a bad uſe of it, and fell. And if there are various claſſes of angels, and different ſpecies of ſpiritual or rational beings between the higheſt order of angels and us, their actions muſt, at leaſt, according to our conception of the actions of rational beings, may be determined by choice. And it is impoſſible for us to

ſay,

ſay, what diverſity there may be in the underſtandings and capacities of thoſe different ranks of creatures; what propenſities or inducements to perſevere in purſuing their duty, or what diſpoſitions or temptations to err.

Now, who can tell how many myriads of thoſe creatures may owe the ſtate of felicity they now enjoy, to the correction of the lapſed angels, and to the ſcene of miſery and folly which the conduct of the vain conceited part of mankind has, almoſt ſince the creation of this ſyſtem, preſented them with?

If a philoſopher views with juſt contempt the ſcandalous ſprings from which the actions of the vitious proceed, what muſt be the ſenſe of intelligent beings of a ſuperior order? How fooliſh, as well as odious, muſt the notions of wicked men be in their eyes? And how noble and magnificent muſt their idea be of the mercy and long-ſuffering of the Eternal, who, for ſo great a ſeries of ages, has been following ſuch wretches with perpetual offers of forgiveneſs and felicity? If in ſuch minds there are any appetites or impulſions ſimilar to thoſe that lead the vain and the wicked of the human race aſtray, how careful muſt they be to reſtrain ſuch deſires; and how thankful to their Maker, for the admonition that has put them on their guard? * * * * *

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